

## ELECTED MEMBER PERSONAL SAFETY PROTOCOL

### 1. Introduction

The relationship between Elected Members and their communities is at the heart of what being an Elected Member is all about. Face-to-face contact where constituents can share problems and concerns is vital to enhancing that relationship. Often the Elected Member role extends beyond just the delivery of Council services and these contacts are usually rewarding and non-adversarial. Elected Members become experienced in calming down and treating with respect and sympathy, angry and frustrated residents who often resort to their elected representative when they feel that they are getting nowhere in resolving their problems through other channels.

Whilst incidents of violence and aggression towards Elected Members are rare, it is acknowledged that because Elected Members are constantly interacting with residents of their community, there are times that these interactions, sometimes potentially linked to controversial decisions that Elected Members are involved in making, may lead to Elected Members being subjected to verbal, written or online abuse.

This protocol sets out some useful steps that Elected Members can follow to keep themselves safe and enable them to carry out their role safely and effectively. The purpose of this protocol is not to make Elected Members nervous, but to set out what reasonable personal safety measures can be taken to prevent and to deal with those rare circumstances when they might find themselves in situations where they become anxious for their safety. Personal safety is about valuing ourselves and taking sensible steps to minimise risk so that everyone is confident and comfortable in their role.

In general terms the guidance follows advice given to others who, by virtue of public duties or employment, meet many people whom they do not know. This protocol has been developed from guidance published by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU).

Additional support is available through the Democratic Services Manager and the Corporate Health and Safety Unit.

### 2. Risk Assessment

A generic risk assessment of Elected Member activities has been undertaken and is available via the intranet and titled 'Elected Member Activities – Generic Risk Assessment'. All Elected Members are advised to consider the risk assessment and how it applies to their activities, and follow the guidance set out to ensure their continued safety.

### 3. Training

All Elected Members will be provided with Personal Safety/Conflict Management Training, including training from South Wales Police, at the start of their term of office and will receive periodic updates to arrangements as necessary. Members also have access to Welsh Government funded training on 'Cyber Ninjas for Councillors' which incorporates training on Data Protection and Cyber Security.

#### 4. Lone Working Guidance

The Authority's Lone Working Guidance can be found on the Council's intranet and all Elected Members are encouraged to familiarise themselves with this document to ensure their own personal safety. The purpose of the guidance is to ensure that there are adequate systems in place to ensure the Health, Safety and Wellbeing of Lone Workers. It is to be read in conjunction with this protocol in order to reduce the risks of lone working as far as is reasonably practicable.

#### 5. Car Safety and Parking

You need to take the same precautions as most car owners do:

- Have your keys in your hand or easily accessible.
- Consider whether an area will be dark and isolated when you return to your car.
- Park where possible, under street lighting.
- Lock the car doors when you get into the car.
- Take boxes/bags to the car when other people are around.
- Try to park on the left- hand side of the road facing the way you want to drive off.
- In a cul-de-sac do not park facing the dead end.
- Try to park in a space where you will not be blocked in.
- At service stations always lock the car when you go to pay.

#### 6. Dealing with Emotional Constituents and Difficult Situations

It is inevitable that some of the people you will meet will be angry or upset. You need to be prepared to handle all types of emotion. For example, it is worth having some tissues on hand.

Elected Members have to develop the quiet skill of being concerned about constituents' problems without being so involved that they become too emotional to be of help. Calmness in the face of whatever comes up will help you and your constituents.

You may find that racist or offensive remarks are made. If they are directed at you - do not respond - this will only make the situation worse. Instead, bring the interview to an end as quickly as possible. If they are more general remarks, you should state that this is not acceptable and that you cannot continue the interview. Often this will elicit an apology. Otherwise ask the person to leave.

Similarly, where you may encounter a constituent who is intoxicated or appears to be suffering from mental health issues, again the above advice would apply in keeping calm and not putting yourself at risk. A Member's primary concern should be keeping yourself safe, followed by raising the alarm if needed for the constituent with the relevant Authorities and/or offering to organise targeted support.

In all situations, you must use your own judgement and if you are alone and in a vulnerable situation do not put yourself at risk.

#### 7. Ward Surgeries

Where ward surgeries are held, the arrangements each Elected Member makes will vary according to local circumstances and it will be a fortunate Elected Member

who can find premises for their surgery which meet every aspect of good practice and are also accessible to their constituents.

What follows are suggestions about how to make a surgery safe and effective. Most Elected Members will go through their entire service on the Council without experiencing any problems, but a little time given to preparation and planning can reduce the already small risk further.

### **The Basics**

- a) Do not hold surgeries alone in an otherwise empty building. Try to get someone to act as receptionist. This not only makes you safer, but also makes it much easier to manage a busy surgery. If you are currently doing surgeries alone, discuss how this can be changed with fellow Elected Members or Council Officers. If you hold surgeries alone make sure you have arrangements for a friend or relative to make regular checks on you or have a buddy system for someone you can call discretely if you need help or assistance. This could include making arrangements with the Town Clerk, Democratic Services Officer, colleague councillor, or a friend/relative. In addition, Elected Members are encouraged to utilise a location App on their personal mobile phones.
- b) If you cannot avoid doing surgeries on your own, make sure you remember a few simple guidelines. The layout of the room should suit you, i.e. you should sit nearest to the door with the constituents seated on the other side of the table. Seating is best set out at an angle of 45 degrees (seating directly opposite can be confrontational).
  - a) If there is no separate waiting room, try to ensure that the waiting constituents are as far as possible away from those whom you are talking to.
  - b) Make sure there are no heavy items in the room that could be used as weapons.
  - c) If you are at the stage of looking for suitable premises in which to hold a surgery, try to get a space with as many as possible of the following features:
    - Council premises (e.g. community centres) during opening hours or other premises where there are many other people about.
    - Premises where the names of any visitors for Elected Members are recorded.
    - Premises where there is a comfortable waiting area.
  - d) Try to ensure the surgery (interviewing) room:
    - a) Is in view of the reception or public area;
    - b) Is connected to the reception by an alarm and there is a procedure for dealing with call for assistance;
    - c) Has a vision panel in the door;
    - d) Has a swift means of escape and any visitors are not able to lock the door from the inside.

- e) If for any reason, during a surgery, you feel concerned about your immediate safety, please call the Emergency services and report this, as detailed in 'Reporting Incidents' below.

## **8. Personal Callers**

Elected Members should seek to maintain a balance between their personal and public lives and should not encourage any callers at their private homes. Good publicity as to how to contact Elected Members and details of ward surgeries reduces the chances of unwanted callers.

## **9. Mail**

As with telephone calls, Elected Members on rare occasions can become the target of malicious or anonymous letters. Any such letters should be given immediately to the Police.

## **10. Home Visits**

Elected Members do sometimes visit residents in their homes, especially those who are elderly, disabled or where they simply want to see for themselves the conditions that are the subject of complaints.

It is for each Elected Member to decide whether a particular visit should be made, especially if the person to be visited is unknown to the Elected Member. Most Elected Members trust their own instincts as to whether to meet someone alone. Sometimes the Elected Member might prefer to be accompanied by a ward colleague or invite the person to a more public place. It is always advisable for you to keep a record of your whereabouts. If necessary, you can let the person whom you are visiting know there is such a record or that you are expected at another place by a certain time etc. or make a call on your mobile phone during the visit.

If you hold home visits alone make sure you have arrangements for a friend or relative to make regular checks on you or have a buddy system for someone you can call discretely if you need help or assistance. This could include making arrangements with the Town Clerk, Democratic Services Officer, colleague councillor, or a friend/relative. Once again, in addition to this, when visiting constituents or involved in any community events, Elected Members are encouraged to utilise a location App on their personal mobile phones.

## **11. Malicious and Nuisance Telephone Calls**

Elected Members occasionally get the odd nuisance or abusive call. Although such calls are likely to be rare, you might become the target of a persistent, anonymous caller with a grudge against the Council. These calls need to be dealt with in accordance with Police advice:

- a. Keep the caller talking.
- b. Note any clues the caller may provide as to sex, age, accent, etc.
- c. Listen for any clues as to the caller's motive and intention.
- d. Write down the details immediately to assist police at a later stage.
- e. Listen for background noise that may provide valuable information (e.g. railway sounds, industrial noises, machinery, music, animals).

- f. Inform the Police.
- g. Inform the Democratic Services Manager.

## 12. Social Media/Online Guidance

As the use of social media increases, Elected Members should ensure that they keep themselves safe online. Elected Members should familiarise themselves with the 'Protocol for the use of Social Media by Elected Members'. This protocol has been developed in line with the Council's ICT protocols and the ICT Code of Practice which is applicable to all Elected Members. The protocol provides guidance including 'Setting up social media accounts', 'Using social media effectively and safely', 'Dealing with difficult posts and complaints' and 'Ways to keep you and others safe'. The protocol also reminds Elected Members that when using social media they will need to conduct themselves in line with the Members' Code of Conduct. It furthermore takes into account that whilst the Council respects the privacy and legal rights of Elected Members, any actions that form part of their role as a councillor may impact on the Council's interests or reputation.

Further guidance can also be found via the Local Government Association's '[Practical Advice for handling online abuse](#)' for Elected Members, the Local Government information Unit's '[Personal Safety for Councillors](#)' which addresses Cyber Safety, as well as the National Cyber Security Centre which provides Cyber security [guidance](#).

For quick reference there are some useful infographics provided by the Local Government Association for use on social media and handling online abuse:

- 'Rules of engagement' [infographic](#) for councillors to use on social media to give all users a clear 'code' by which they should operate (also in [Welsh](#))
- 'Handling online abuse' [infographic](#) - a quick reference guide for councillors with steps they can take to protect themselves online and seek support where needed. (also in [Welsh](#))

## 13. Meetings

Where officers have prior knowledge of particular conflict or where they identify that there is a significant potential for such conflict to arise in a meeting or site visit, Democratic Services staff along with relevant department staff, will undertake a suitable assessment to mitigate any instances and provide a framework for dealing with the issues when they arise. This will also take account of the requirements and actions to be taken regarding any disturbance by the public as set out within the Council's Constitution.

## 14. Elected Member Address

Should an Elected Member wish for their home address or telephone number to be removed from the Authority's website, they should contact the Democratic Services Manager who will arrange for either or both to be replaced by the Democratic Services Team details. However, the Elected Member's email address should remain on the Authority's website and be promoted as necessary save in exceptional circumstances.

## 15. Appropriate Security Measures

It may be necessary to provide further support to a Member to enable them to discharge their role reasonably and safely. This may require the funding of appropriate security measures to protect Members from personal risk or significant threat. Any such request will be considered on its merits by the Monitoring Officer and Chief Officer – Finance, Performance and Change but there will be an expectation that such security measures have been advised by the police or security services. Risk assessments and the relevant bodies would normally inform the required provision of support.

## 16. Damage to property

While not frequent, Elected Members may encounter occasions where personal property is targeted intentionally by someone. Elected Members must report such instances to the Police for action and also report concerns to the Democratic Services Manager and/or Monitoring Officer. Consideration may be given to what steps may be taken to address the issue and prevent any recurrence.

## 17. Reporting Incidents

Any incidents of concern, even if fairly minor or 'near-misses', should be reported to the Police and the Democratic Services Manager and/or Monitoring Officer. This enables the Authority to undertake proper monitoring and decide if any action is needed to prevent a recurrence. You may also consider it advisable to notify ward colleagues.

If you are concerned about your immediate safety this should be done by calling 999. You can report non-urgent concerns to your local force by calling 101 or you can report online using the South Wales Police ['Report a Crime'](#) online form.

An emergency is described as:

- A crime is in progress
- Someone suspected of a crime is nearby
- When there is danger to life
- When violence is being used or threatened.

The Local Government Association's ['Councillors' guide to handling harassment'](#), abuse and intimidation provides a series of practical guidance as well as sections on the ['Definitions of harassment, abuse and intimidation'](#) and ['What legal support there is'](#) and what you should expect from the police when reporting an incident or concerning behaviour.

In relation to hate crime, this is defined as 'Any criminal offence which is perceived by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice based on a person's race or perceived race; religion or perceived religion; sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation; disability or perceived disability and any crime motivated by hostility or prejudice against a person who is transgender or perceived to be transgender.'

Again, you can report any hate crime to the police directly by calling 101 or visit [Report hate crime | Police.uk \(www.police.uk\)](#) You can also report antisemitic incidents to the [Community Safety Trust](#), (which also offers useful advice and guidance) or Islamophobia can be reported via [TELL MAMA](#). Once again, it must

be stressed that you should always call 999 if a crime is in progress or if someone is in immediate danger.

### **18. Local Neighbourhood Policing Teams**

Elected Members are encouraged to develop professional relationships with their local neighbourhood police teams to discuss any community/personal safety concerns.

### **19. Emergency Contact Details**

It is advisable to provide this information to the Democratic Services Manager should it be necessary to contact your family / next of kin in the event of an emergency.

### **20. Elected Member Party Guidance**

Elected Members are also encouraged to contact their own political party where appropriate to seek additional guidance on the above issues.

### **Additional Useful Guidance**

[Personal Safety for Members](#): Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) guidance.

[Personal Safety Guidance for Elected Members](#): Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) guidance.

[Personal Safety Advice](#): Susie Lamplugh Trust guidance covers canvassing and campaigning, dealing with aggression, stalking, lone working, personal alarms, hate crime and internet safety.

[Councillor's Guide to handling harassment, abuse and intimidation](#): Local Government Association Guidance

[Get Safe Online guidance](#): Government supported website, Get Safe Online. This covers everything from protecting your devices to social networking to information security.

[Improving digital citizenship: A practical guide for councillors | Local Government Association \(Welsh version\)](#)

Research and Good Practice [Improving digital citizenship: Research and good practice | Local Government Association \(Welsh version\)](#)

[The Blue Book: A Guide to Personal Security](#): National Counter Terrorism Security Office

[ACT e-Learning](#) Free Counter Terrorism Awareness Course

Protect UK <https://www.protectuk.police.uk/resources/51>

NPCC, CPS, The Electoral Commission, College of Policing [Joint Guidance for Candidates in Elections 2021 \(electoralcommission.org.uk\)](#)

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust guidance for lone working:

- [Personal Safety at work | Suzy Lamplugh Trust](#)
- [www.suzylamplugh.org/personal-safety-at-home](http://www.suzylamplugh.org/personal-safety-at-home)

[Prevent Programme](#), Home Office programme, whose core mission is stopping people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism.

