

STANDARDS (ADVISORY) COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 24 October 2018 at 6.00 p.m.

Committee Room 1, 1st Floor, Town Hall, Mulberry Place, 5 Clove
Crescent, London E14 2BG

SUPPLEMENTAL AGENDA

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3 .2 Councillors Safety - update

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Member Safety Protocol refreshed January 2018



Personal Safety - A Guide for Members

Introduction

This guide aims to provide practical personal safety measures to reduce or prevent risk in circumstances where Members might be anxious for their personal safety.

Circumstances will vary and Members will take their own decisions about how to conduct their duties as Members while remaining easily accessible to their residents.

An important role of Members is to keep in touch with their communities which may include helping individuals with any problems they might have. Often this extends beyond just the delivery of council services. These contacts are usually rewarding and non-adversarial. However, Members may sometimes be in contact with angry and frustrated individuals and will need to deal calmly and sympathetically with difficult or sensitive situations.

By taking time to prepare for meetings, and following the advice set out in this guidance note Members can reduce any risk.

This note sets out advice on the following topics:

1. **Dealing with Constituents**
2. **Reporting Incidents**
3. **How Best to Ensure Safety at Ward Surgeries**
4. **Home Visits**
5. **Personal Callers at Your Home**
6. **Attendance at Meetings**
7. **Car Safety and Parking**
8. **Malicious and Nuisance Telephone Calls**
9. **Mail/Email**
10. **Training**
11. **Social Media**
12. **Assistance for Members from Legal Services**
13. **Flowchart of Actions to take in the event of harassment or abuse**

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1. Dealing with Constituents

If you meet with a constituent or other individual and they make remarks that you find uncomfortable or inappropriate do not respond – this will most likely only make the situation worse, instead consider bringing the meeting to an end as quickly as possible; inform the person that you cannot continue the meeting and ask the person to leave.

2. Reporting Incidents

Any Member who feels at risk from abuse or physical harm at any time during a meeting with a constituent or other individual either at a surgery or a home visit should always vacate the premises immediately and report the incident. Do not wait to report the incident to officers, as this will cause unnecessary delay – phone the police immediately yourself:

- **In an emergency phone the police on 999**
- For non-emergency situations where you have felt at risk report the incident to the police on the non-emergency number 101.

Any incidents of concern, even if relatively minor or 'nearly happened', should be reported to the Head of Members Support on 0207 364 4872. This enables the Authority to undertake proper monitoring and decide if any action needs to be taken to prevent similar incidents reoccurring.

You should also inform your Party Whip and the Group Political Advisor, who will report the incident within the group. You should advise ward colleagues. If you have involved the police maintain contact with them and follow their advice.

3. How Best to Ensure Safety at Ward Surgeries

The arrangements each Member makes will vary accordingly to local circumstances. What follows are suggestions about how to make a surgery safe and effective – some apply wherever the surgery is held while others are good practice to be followed. Most Members will go through their entire service to the council without experiencing any problems but preparation and planning for ward surgeries and contact with constituents will reduce the already small risk further.

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 of the following features:

- Council premises (e.g. Idea Stores) during opening hours or other premises where there are many other people about.
- Premises where the names of any visitors for Members are recorded.
- Premises where there is a comfortable waiting area.
- The surgery (interviewing) room:
 - Is in view of any reception or public area.

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- Is connected to the reception by an alarm and there is a procedure for dealing with a call for assistance.
- Has a vision panel in the door.
- Is decorated in calming (pastel) colours.
- Has a swift means of escape and any visitors are not able to lock the door from the inside.

General Safety Tips

- Do not hold surgeries alone in empty buildings.
- Try to use Council premises during opening hours (a list can be supplied on request).
- Check that your mobile phone is well charged, working and that you have a signal, as there may be reception blind spots.
- 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.
- Where possible use a room with a vision panel in the door.
- Ensure there is a swift means of exit and any visitors are not able to lock the door from the inside.
- Have a clear view of any reception or public area.
- Place seating at an angle of 45 degrees (seating directly opposite can be confrontational).
- If there is no separate waiting room, try to ensure that the waiting constituents are as far as possible away from those who you are talking to.
- Make sure there are no heavy items in the room that could be used as weapons.
- Have a clear and agreed procedure for dealing with a call for assistance.
- Ensure someone knows of your whereabouts. You should let colleagues or family know when you arrive, expect to finish, and inform them when you have finished.

4. Home Visits

It is for each Member to decide whether a particular visit should be made, especially if the person to be visited is unknown to the Member. The Council strongly recommends that you do not undertake home visits.

However, a home visit is most likely to be undertaken if the resident is elderly or disabled and mobility or other issues make holding a meeting elsewhere more problematic, or it may be that Members want to see for themselves conditions that are the subject of complaints. Before arranging a home visit, Members should always consider alternative options:

- Can contact be made by telephone or email?
- Can a meeting be arranged in a public place such as a community centre or café?
- Can the resident attend a ward surgery (if appropriate)?

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If a home visit is undertaken, the following general personal safety issues should be considered and planned beforehand:

- Do not attend the property alone, take a ward colleague, or another person with you.
- Arrange the visit during normal working hours, if possible.
- Make sure there will be a record of your whereabouts. You should let colleagues or family know when you expect to finish, and arrange to confirm with them when you have finished.
- Assess the situation and mood of the resident. Note any other people in the property and their mood.
- If in any doubt or if you feel threatened, do not enter. Make an excuse and leave.
- Phone the police to report the incident in an emergency on 999, non-emergency 101, and follow the procedure for reporting the incident to the Head of Members Support and to your Group.

5. Personal Callers at Your Home

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

6. Attendance at Meetings

As a Member you will attend various meetings. It is possible that, depending on the nature and outcomes of a particular meeting, members of the public may leave feeling angry or upset.

In circumstances where a meeting has become fraught, Members may wish to leave together, or ask a supportive resident to accompany them when they leave the meeting. If you are very concerned that there is a threat to you, phone the police on 999.

7. Car Safety and Parking

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

- Consider whether an area will be dark and isolated when you return to your car.
- Park, where possible, under street lighting.
- Lock car doors as soon as getting into the car.
- Take boxes/bags to the car when other people are around.

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8. Malicious and Nuisance Telephone Calls

Members can get the odd nuisance or abusive call, although infrequently, they can become the target of a persistent, anonymous caller who may have a grudge against the council. These calls need to be dealt with in accordance with police advice:

- Keep the caller talking.
- Note any clues the caller may provide as to their gender, accent etc.
- Listen for any clues as to the motive and intention of the caller.
- Write down the details immediately to assist police at a later stage.
- Listen for background noise which may provide valuable information (e.g. railway or industrial noises, machinery, music, animals etc.).
- Dial 999 and inform the police.
- Inform Members Support on 0207 364 4872.

9. Mail/Email

As with telephone calls, Members on rare occasions can become the target of a malicious anonymous letter or email. Any such letters or emails should be reported to the Police (via 999 if an imminent threat is present or via 101 if malicious) and reported to Members Support (0207 364 4872).

10. Training

To assist you to undertake your role as a Member with a minimum of personal risk, the council will arrange training for all Members. Training will be offered as part of the Member Development Programme.

Members may find websites such as the Suzy Lamplugh Trust informative in offering further advice: <http://www.suzylamplugh.org/>

But please remember above all else: **IN AN EMERGENCY PHONE THE POLICE ON 999**

11. Social Media

- Be careful about what personal information (for example, family links, home address, phone numbers etc.) you post on-line.
- Make sure you understand and know how to use the privacy settings on social media websites, so that you know how to control the type of information about you and who can and cannot see it.
- Be aware that social media websites' privacy policies change from time to time, so you should keep your privacy setting under regular review.
- Be wary of becoming 'friends' with people you don't know.
- Check your friends and followers regularly to ensure you are aware of who is following you.

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- Let a friend or family member know if you arrange to meet someone in person who you've met online.
- While it might be appropriate to respond to people who disagree with your views or policies, if things become abusive it is best to withdraw from the conversation rather than feed it.

Reporting and Preventing Abuse on Social Media

Several social media platforms have developed tools to make reporting easier, to secure potential evidence and to prevent unwanted communications, including those that do not amount to a criminal offence. These include a report link, so that particular or multiple communications can be reported directly to the platform. Social media sites may then decide to remove content and disable or suspend accounts, although it is not technically possible for a platform to guarantee a user will not return once their account is closed.

If a matter is reported to the police they should make a data retention request to the platform so that evidence is secured for any investigation.

You can help to prevent abuse by:

- Taking screenshots of the offending material, which can be saved on or off the device (for example, cloud storage or a USB drive).
- Use the tools on most social media platforms to block or mute the person who has uploaded abusive content, so that they can no longer see posts or have a conversation with you.
- Unsubscribe or "un-follow" accounts that produce or share offensive material.
- Turn on login alerts, which prompt the platform provider to send a notification if someone tries to log into an account from a new place.

For further information on social media, please speak to the Communications Team.

When Is Offensive Content Criminal?

The Crown Prosecution Service sets out four categories of criminal offence:

1. Credible threats (to a person's life or safety or property).
2. Communications targeting specific individuals (including persistent harassment and ongoing abuse).
3. Breach of court orders (for example identifying people protected by law).
4. Communications which are grossly offensive, indecent, obscene or false.

The guidance makes the distinction between the first three categories, which will be robustly prosecuted and the last category to which a high threshold for

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prosecution applies. In all cases, prosecutors will consider the full context of the communication and the public interest test.

For more information, go to The Crown Prosecution Service "[Guidelines on prosecuting cases involving communications sent via social media](#)".

Further cyber security advice can be found on the Government's website [Cyber Streetwise](#) and on the Government supported website [Get Safe Online](#).

12. Assistance for Members from Legal Services

Legal Services will meet with Members as requested who are experiencing harassment or are concerned about the behaviour of any residents or other persons to discuss the range of legal options available to the Member.

Legal Services work closely with colleagues in the Community Safety Team and with external partners such as the police in dealing with instances such as these. Any matters which are criminal will be dealt with by the police.

If you feel you have suffered any harassment or feel threatened, please contact the Corporate Director, Governance or the Divisional Director - Legal.

Legal Services will consider with the Member the most suitable course of action and explain to the Member the process, what evidence they need to provide and the timescales. Options under civil law include:

- Letter before action, which will warn the person to desist from that behaviour and advising that court proceedings will be started if the behaviour does not stop.
- Civil injunctions using section 222 of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), section 1 of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 or section 3 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. Injunctions will usually only be granted by the court on strong evidence and for more than one incident.

Members are always encouraged to take contemporaneous notes of any incidents and to include as much detail as possible, as this increases the likelihood of success of any legal action.

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13. Flowchart of Actions to take in the event of harassment or abuse

