



## Personal Safety Guidance for Elected Members

All elected Members deal with residents' concerns sometimes by phone or email and sometimes face to face. Those individuals can feel upset and angry and in extreme circumstances may lead to you feeling concerned about your safety. The purpose of this guidance to elected Members is to set out what personal safety measures can be taken to cope with those rare circumstances.

### **If you hold ward surgeries**

- Choose your venue carefully, such as a busy community centre, library or where there will be other people using the building at the same time. Avoid holding your ward surgery in an empty venue or in a room where you could be locked in.
- Don't hold a surgery on your own, if possible hold ward surgeries at the same time as your ward colleagues or ask someone to work with you and act as a receptionist.
- Plan and schedule all your meetings, build in a support network in case of problems.
- Advertise your ward surgeries and stick to it, that way your constituents will always know where you will be during this time but so will those close to you.
- Consider room layout, keeping entrance and exits clear at all times. The layout of the room needs to suit you – constituents should be seated across a table from you with you sitting nearest to the door.
- Keep your mobile phone to hand.

### **Making home visits**

- Avoid home visits where you have concerns about your safety. Use alternatives – try to encourage constituents to meet you in a public place or take a colleague. You can also book a room in advance in the Town Hall to meet residents.
- Keep a record of your appointment in your diary/calendar which includes name/address/telephone number of the constituent you are visiting – this protects your time and your safety.
- Understand the reason for the personal visit and try to get some information from officers prior to your visit; not only does this make the meeting more meaningful, it may also highlight any personal safety concerns others have had in the past.
- Think about where and how you park your car – if possible park close to the property you are visiting under a lit street light and in the direction that you will be going at the end of your visit – this makes for an easier and speedy exit if needed.
- Use a system to make sure people know where you are and the estimated time of your return.
- When conducting a home visit always sit nearest to the door that you came in, as you know how to get out that way.

## **Receiving personal callers**

- Discourage constituents from coming to your home.
- Keep your diary with you so that you can organise an alternative appointment and venue there and then—or make arrangements to phone them.
- Try to maintain distance.
- Remember – even though you are a councillor you are still entitled to a personal life.
- If you have concerns about the publishing of your home address, you can use the Town Hall address instead—speak to Democratic Services .

## **Receiving abusive phone calls**

- Remember, you have the choice to hang up.
- If you choose to keep talking, try to get clues to identify the caller's gender, any accent etc.
- Always try 1471 to see if the number is available.
- Take notes.
- Inform the Council (Democratic Services) – who, with your consent, will inform the police.

## **Electronic Communication**

- If you receive abusive or prolific emails, texts or messages via social media that give you cause for concern about your safety -
  - Stop all communication with them.
  - Seek advice on blocking messages from that person .
  - Inform Democratic Services and/or police depending on the seriousness.

## **Key issues and support available**

- Keep your mobile phone with you at all times and make sure that the battery is charged regularly.
- Plan your meetings. Weigh up the risks in any situation and take action appropriately.
- Always make sure that someone is aware of your whereabouts and your estimated time of return.
- Retain control of situations, keep calm and avoid confrontation.
- Trust your instincts – if you feel uncomfortable or intimidated make your excuses and leave.
- Consider any health issues you may have and how this may impact on how you meet constituents.
- Avoid putting yourself into a situation which you think your personal safety could be compromised.
- Record and report incidents to the Council initially to Democratic Services.
- The Council operates a Call Care system for staff. If you feel you may want to access it contact Democratic Services.