



Personal Safety for Elected Members



Introduction

Our personal safety is something many of us take for granted, and it is only when a major incident occurs that we stop and think about our own vulnerability. The murder of MP Sir David Amess will have caused even the most confident amongst us to take a step back to reflect on the way that we manage any risks associated with our role.

There have been very few major incidents involving violence toward local or national politicians, although when attacks do take place they are widely reported. There are no statistics to prove that public figures are at more risk than anybody else who is involved in carrying out a front-facing role.

Whilst most of the aggression councillors experience will usually sit at the 'low to modest' spectrum of unacceptable behaviour, severe abuse can tip into the legal definition of violence even if no physical interaction is involved.

We should all take time out of our busy schedules to reflect on the systems and processes we should have in place to help keep us safe, and to reduce any risks we may be exposed to in our councillor role.

Below is some information that has been compiled from LGIU and LGA guidelines. For more information, visit the government website: www.hse.gov.uk/risk/casestudies/

General principles of personal safety

There are four broad principles to consider linked to personal safety:

1. Organic risk assessment
2. Gut feel
3. Early choices
4. Routine

1. Organic risk assessment

Organic risk assessment is more focused on assessing risk in the here and now, based on the signals we are picking up from our environment.

It is generally believed that a person who is new into a role is much better at identifying and assessing risk than somebody else who has been carrying out the same activity for a period of time who can sometimes become complacent.

2. Recognise and use your gut feel

No risk assessment can replace using our own senses to determine what feels safe, versus what feels wrong. This is often referred to as 'gut feel'.

Unfortunately, as adults we often silence our gut feeling in an attempt to intellectualise it. In personal safety terms, gut feel is one of the most important tools we have.



Remove yourself immediately from the situation if you feel unsafe, analyse later but your immediate safety is the priority.

3. Early choices

Early choices are conscious decisions we make about our personal safety that can help to protect us if we have a problem.

De-briefing people who have been involved in events where their personal safety has been compromised, and it is estimate that most, if not all, have expressed regrets about early choices they could have made and didn't.

4. Routine

Routine is often described as the enemy of personal safety because it makes our behaviour predictable and reliable. Whilst reliability is often a prized characteristic, in safety terms it can make us vulnerable, particularly when an habitual activity is known to others.

Whilst it isn't always possible or practical to vary patterns a huge amount, when you are able to do so, change your routine so that you vary the time and places you do things.

Handling intimidation

Introduction

This document is not designed to alarm, but to suggest some steps you can undertake to protect yourself as a person in a public position, and how to respond should an incident occur.

The most important determining factor in deciding how to respond to intimidation is the impact it is having on you. Regardless of what others may think, if it is having an effect on you, then that is sufficient for you to take action.

Key points:

- Councillors are encouraged to keep a record of any intimidatory communication or behaviour
- Contact with unknown or anonymous individuals should be undertaken with care

General advice

Below are a suggested set of actions that you could undertake if you consider you are being subjected to intimidation:

- Make sure that your immediate safety is not at risk. Make sure you are safe.
- If possible, record or diarise the encounter or communication. In the case of an email or letter, you can copy or save it. A telephone call or face-to-face discussion and social media incident should be written in a diary as soon as possible after the event, recorded, screen-shot or saved. You can also take photos of damage or even a computer screen. Even if this is the first or only incident, others may also have been subjected to intimidation. A collective record is important if future action is

going to be taken. It is also important that incidents relating to the same individual or individuals should be recorded as such evidence could be critical should the matter give rise to a criminal prosecution.

- Raise the incident with a view to discussing it or obtaining support from a nominated council officer and/or political group nominated person. This will also help you establish if others have been subjected to the same or similar intimidation.
- If a serious potential crime has occurred, it is advisable to formally report it to the council and/or to the police, particularly in the context of a serious threat to life or anticipated violence.
- If you are concerned about your personal safety, raise this with the council and the police so that there is a record of the impact the incident is having and review your own security and personal safety. This could include your personal or work activities and those of your family.
- Under the Health and Safety at Work Act, councils have a duty to safeguard their staff against potentially violent persons and BwDC maintain a Caution list with names of such parties. This will enable you to ascertain if the individual or individuals who have intimidated them are on the Caution List, if not; ensure that their name is added using the appropriate processes.
- Every situation will be different, and it will need a personal judgement about whether it is worthwhile to pursue the incident, ignore it or politely acknowledge.
- If the letters or emails continue further steps may need to be considered such as advising the individual that such abuse will result in a referral to the police and the stopping of further correspondence.

Shield Principles

In addressing public intimidation, the LGA has developed the following SHIELD principles:

Safeguard – where possible, protect yourself online and in person. For example, set out in any online biography or page that abusive, threatening or intimidatory communication or actions will be reported, utilise security features, take personal safety precautions and have a point of contact in the local police for any incidents.

Help – in any situation ensure you are safe before you take further action and get help if needed. If the threat is not immediate, you can contact officers at the council who have been given the responsibility to support you or someone with that role from your political group.

Inform – you can inform the individual or group that you consider their communication or action as intimidating, threatening or abusive. There is a growing movement of ‘digital citizenship’, which encourages the labelling of poor online conduct as a way of challenging such behaviour.

Evidence – if you consider that a communication or action is intimidatory, threatening or abusive, gather evidence. For example, photos, recordings, screen-shots, letters, emails, details of witnesses, etc.

Let people know – report the incident to your social media platform/officers/party contact/lead member/the police, depending on the nature and severity of the incident(s). Be prepared that the police



and courts will look to determine if the incident is intimidation based on the theoretical opinion of the average person.

Decide – determine whether you want to continue receiving communications from the individual or group and block or mute if on social media where appropriate. Decide if you want to pursue any action to inhibit the ability of the individual or group to approach you.

Specific safety tips

A number of safety tips have been compiled from a variety of sources including guidance from councillors, which have been shared during training sessions. They relate to the different activities councillors are involved in as part of their role and come from the Police and from personal safety agencies. Most of the approaches are simply common sense. The full list can be found at the end of this document.

You must always check the Caution list located on the Intranet [here](#) prior to any visit or meeting with someone not known to you.

Incident reporting

If you are involved in an incident, or have concerns around an individual's behaviour, it is important to report this to the Democratic Services team.

An incident report must be completed as soon as possible after an event, whilst memories are fresh and so that issues can be investigated and appropriate action taken. This should be forwarded to the Health and Wellbeing team.

If the incident involves acts of a potential criminal nature the Police Authority have created a helpful guide to understanding what constitutes criminal acts and how you can report this. You can access this information by clicking the link below:

[https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdf file/Joint-Guidance-for-Candidates-in-Elections.pdf](https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdf_file/Joint-Guidance-for-Candidates-in-Elections.pdf)

- This link provides information about common cyber-attacks seen against those in politics, and suggests preventative measures <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-individuals-in-politics> .

Key Contact Information: Report an incident - report.ncsc.gov.uk or incidents@ncsc.gov.uk ;
Enquiries: enquiries@ncsc.gov.uk

Social Media companies have also provided guidance on online security and how to report incident. This guidance can be accessed using the links below



9. Online Security
Information - CSP Gui

- Online Security Information for Candidates
<https://uk.internetassociation.org/blog/resource-for-parliamentary-candidates/>
Key Contact Information: Twitter: [@govuk](https://twitter.com/govuk); Facebook: [@ukpol](https://www.facebook.com/ukpol);
Google and YouTube: [ukpublicpolicy](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpublicpolicy)

Other sources of help

One of your key sources of help should be the council's safety procedures. These will include policies around Lone Working, and general support associated with safety in the councillor role.

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust is particularly well known for the quality of their advice. Their website is: <http://www.suzylamplugh.org>.

We also offer the following me-learning courses:

- Handling intimidation for elected members
- Stress Management and Personal Resilience for Elected Members
- Handling Complaints for Service Improvement for Elected Members
- Facilitation and Conflict Resolution for Elected Member
- Supporting your Constituents for Elected Members
- Community Engagement and Leadership for Elected Members
- Information Governance for Elected Members
- Lone Working

These courses can be located on the Blackburn with Darwen Learning site [here](#) .

To view these courses go to the course library, select online courses and a list of all online courses will appear. The above courses can be searched for by using the search bar on the right hand side of the page.

And finally

Please remember, we live in a world where by far the majority of people are friendly and gentle, and where many kind acts go unnoticed and unreported.

Personal safety is about taking sensible steps to minimise risk, so that we are confident and comfortable in our councillor role.