

**REPORT OF: STRATEGIC HEAD OF SERVICE – LEGAL
& GOVERNANCE AND MONITORING OFFICER**

TO: STANDARDS COMMITTEE

ON: 18 October 2021

SUBJECT: Councillor’s guide to handling intimidation and personal safety

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

To approve the local Guide to handling intimidation to supplement the LGA Guide published on 4th July 2019 and updated in October 2021.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Standards Committee is asked:

1. To note the action taken to date following the update of the LGA Guide in 2021
2. To approve the local short Guide.

3. BACKGROUND

The Local Government Association (LGA) published its Guide to handling intimidation for Councillors in 2019 and this has been updated in 2021

The Guide is available to download in full via the link below.

www.local.gov.uk/councillors-guide-handling-intimidation

The guide covers topics such as how to handle abuse, both face-to-face, letters or online, and the legal and practical remedies, including the nature of the criminal offences involved and the LGA have confirmed this will be continuously updated with the latest advice and information available.

The Monitoring Officer circulated the link to the Guide to all Councillors in Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council on the date of publication and advised that the Standards Committee would consider a review of the Guide alongside our current local general advice to members.

At their meeting in October 2019 the Standards Committee discussed the Guide and suggested that a shortened local Guide be produced to supplement the national guide. This has been updated in October 2021 to meet current National guidance.

This has been drafted by officers and due to the General Election was circulated in draft form to all elected members to assist them in the event of any issues arising during the campaigning.

It is now proposed that the Standards Committee consider recommending to the Full Council the formal adoption of the updated local Guide to supplement that produced by the LGA.

Both Guides to be available on the Council's website for easy access.

4. RATIONALE

The Standards Committee's role and function includes oversight of the development of quality information being provided to members in their roles as decision makers and Ward councillors. It also includes the direct provision of related member development training and advice, promoting high standards in the conduct of council business.

The national Guide in its introduction describes becoming and serving as a councillor as a responsibility, a privilege and a hugely rewarding undertaking, but also advises that we are aware that an increasing number of councillors and candidates are being subjected to abuse, threats and public intimidation, undermining the principles of free speech, democratic engagement and debate. The growth of social media has provided an additional and largely anonymous route for individuals and groups to engage in such activity.

The Guides are not designed to alarm, but to suggest some steps councillors and their council can continually undertake to protect councillors as a person in a public position, and how to respond should an incident occur.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct policy implications from the report.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications from this report.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Councillors are not employees of the council and do not have the benefit of safeguards in employment legislation if they suffer intimidation. However, the council does seek to support councillors to undertake their duties safely and without fear or intimidation. Political parties may also offer direct support. In undertaking activities as a councillor, councillors are protected by the same legislation relating to intimidation or threats as to any member of the public.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Support to members by the provision of local advice and support is provided via existing resources in Governance Services and Human Resources (Health, Safety and Wellbeing) teams.

9. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

There are no equality implications as the Guide has been produced to support a healthy democracy and provide guidance to councillors supporting existing legislation designed to protect not only councillors but the general public as a whole and ensure that equality of treatment and access to advice and services for all are maintained.

10. CONSULTATIONS

The Standards Committee is being consulted through this report.

Contact Officer:
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Date: 18th October 2021