



**REPORT OF: DIRECTOR OF HR & LEGAL & GOVERNANCE**

**TO: STANDARDS COMMITTEE**

**ON: 15<sup>th</sup> January 2020**

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**SUBJECT: Personal Safety Guide for Councillors**

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## **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

To approve a local Personal Safety Guide for Councillors incorporating a local Guide to handling intimidation to supplement the LGA Guide published on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2019.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Standards Committee is asked:

1. To note the action taken to date following the publication of the LGA Guide in July 2019
2. To approve the local short Personal Safety Guide for members.

## **3. BACKGROUND**

On 4<sup>th</sup> July 2019, the Local Government Association (LGA) published its Guide to handling intimidation for Councillors. The Guide is available to download in full via the link below.

[www.local.gov.uk/councillors-guide-handling-intimidation](http://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 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 local Guide re-titled to Personal Safety Guide for Councillors 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 was consulted through this report.

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Monitoring Officer

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Date: 18<sup>th</sup> December 2019