

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

MEMBERS' SAFETY GUIDANCE

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Councillors have the very important role of communicating with the residents in their Wards and with that comes many opportunities for communication – face-to-face, phone and email as well as via social media platforms. These communications are crucial to the role of a Councillor to help them stay engaged with the residents in their Ward.
- 1.2 Many Councillors have considerable experience in communicating with their Ward residents and whilst in the main these interactions are rewarding it is sometimes the rare case whereby individual behaviours of members of the public, often through anger and frustration can lead Councillors to be concerned for their safety and can, on occasion, cause their personal lives to come under scrutiny.
- 1.3 It is recognised that harassment, personal attacks on character and intimidation, and confrontation all have a negative impact and the purpose of this Guidance is to support and assist Councillors and help them identify when they may need to take personal safety and security measures ahead of, and in, situations which cause the Councillors to feel concerned for their personal safety.
- 1.4 This guidance is based on that issued by the Local Government Association and its aim is to aide Councillors manage their personal safety whilst being accessible to their residents.

2. DEALING WITH EMOTIONS

- 2.1 Some residents may be contacting a Councillor because they are unhappy about something which has – or hasn't – been done. This may include decisions which have been made.
- 2.2 Councillors are skilled at dealing with residents and will have developed good ways for handling emotive residents. Skilled at balancing concern about a resident's concern with not becoming too emotional to assist them is key. Councillors should be aware of how they initially respond to a situation so as not to inflame it and to be aware when there needs to be a 'cut off' point if the situation makes you feel uneasy or scared there could be a possibility of escalation by an individual(s).
- 2.3 It is okay for you to advise individuals that you will be stepping back to give space and to ask them to take a step back from you if they are too close.
- 2.4 Councillors must however be able to feel they can move away from such situations and must physically be able to move away from the individual(s) so if you do feel uneasy, threatened or concerned for your safety, please do advise the individual why you are ending the conversation and move away.

- 2.5 Racist and other offensive remarks are not acceptable in any circumstances. If the comment is directed to you, Councillors are advised not to respond to these no matter how angry they make you. This may worsen the situation. Instead, bring the meeting to a close. If a more general remark is made, you should tell the resident that it is unacceptable. Usually, a person will apologise but if this is not the case, tell them that you will be ending the meeting. Whatever the approach you take, you should use your own judgement, particularly if you are in a vulnerable position, such as being alone. Do not put yourself at risk no matter how upset or angry you are.
- 2.6 Concerns which Councillors have about individuals' behaviours which lead them to have concern for their safety should be reported to the Police and any behaviours which are of immediate concern should be reported by calling 999.
- 2.7 If Councillors feel able to, any report made to the Police should also be reported to the Head of Democratic Services. This will help the Council support that Councillor by having an awareness of situations.
- 2.8 Councillors are encouraged to share their experiences, advice and guidance with one another.

3. HOME VISITS

- 3.1 It is recommended that home visits are undertaken in exceptional circumstances only. For example, if a resident cannot leave their home to meet at a surgery or if they wish to show a Councillor the cause of a complaint and do not have the ability to do this virtually, via phone or with photographs.
- 3.2 The alternative option of meeting virtually should be explored in the event it is impossible for the resident to meet outside of their home.
- 3.3 If it isn't viable to meet in another public location, virtually, by telephone or by the resident sharing photographs of any issue, it is up to an individual Councillor to decide whether the visit should be made. Councillors will trust their own instincts (the 'pit of the stomach' feeling). This may be more relevant if the resident is not known to you.
- 3.4 If a visit does need to take place, ask who else will also be present and whether there will be any dogs at the property. You might want to ask for any dogs to stay in an alternative room to the one you are meeting in.
- 3.5 Before entering, have a short door-step dialogue. Use all your senses and if something doesn't smell, sound, look or feel right, make an excuse, and let them know you will re-arrange.
- 3.6 If a home visit is undertaken Councillors should be accompanied by a fellow Ward Councillor and ensure you let somebody know where you are visiting and that someone else (family member, friend or another Councillor) knows where you are and the time and expected duration of your appointment. You may want to put in place measures such as agreeing a "check-in" phone call to that

trusted person for the end of the meeting as well as agreeing that if they haven't heard from you, they contact you.

4. WARD SURGERIES

- 4.1 It is accepted that it will not always be possible to find a location which meets every requirement of best practice and is accessible, but the following suggestions may assist Councillors make their surgeries safer and more effective.
- 4.2 Prior to the surgery starting, make sure your mobile phone is charged and that you can get a signal in your location. If there is a landline available at the premises, make sure you are given access to it. If you have a personal alarm, please ensure the batteries are working and take it with you
- 4.3 Where possible, try not to hold surgeries in an otherwise empty building and it is strongly advised that Councillors have someone assist you from both a logistics aspect as well as a safety one.
- 4.4 Consideration should be given to assessing the location for safety. For example, try and make sure you are seated nearest to the door with the resident sat on the other side of a desk. Keep the desk clear of items including hot drinks and to avoid a feeling of confrontation, consider the seating at a 45-degree angle.
- 4.5 If the premises does not have a waiting room, seat waiting residents as far away as possible to maintain confidentiality as much as possible.
- 4.6 When looking for a suitable location consider whether any rooms have a connection to an alarm and there is a procedure for dealing with calls for assistance. Does the door have a glass panel, or can it remain slightly open (but still maintain confidentiality) and consider your exit and whether the door could be locked from the inside. If possible, make sure the room is in view of a public area or reception.

5. COMMUNITY ACTION TEAM (CAT) MEETINGS

- 5.1 Ahead of CAT meetings Officers carry out risk assessments to assess the risk for holding the meetings at a venue as well as assessing any risk to councillors and officers in attendance.
- 5.2 Councillors are encouraged to contact officers responsible for CAT meetings if they wish to discuss the risk assessment.

6. TELEPHONE CALLS, VISITORS AND POST

- 6.1 To maintain a good balance between your private life and that as a Councillor, Members are discouraged from seeing members of the public at their home and are discouraged from inviting them into your home. Good publicity about Surgeries and Resident's meetings will help to give residents a place where they can go to speak to their Councillor.
- 6.2 Councillors already follow a common-sense approach of checking who is at their front door and undertaking basic security measures. It is recommended that Councillors set their expectations with their family members as to what they should do if someone calls when you are not there or expected home, so they don't feel unprepared to handle the situation and invite them in to wait.
- 6.3 Although rare, Councillors may receive abusive or aggressive telephone calls and these should be dealt with in line with Police advice.
- 6.4 If a Councillor receives any post which is malicious, threatening or abusive, this should be retained and reported to the Police. Care should be taken with letters or parcels which look suspicious or contain any unknown substance.
- 6.5 Any such calls or letters should also be reported to the Head of Democratic Services and the Monitoring Officer who can give you further support and advice.

7. CAR PARKING

- 7.1 When parking in a public parking area, you should take the usual precautions that you would take as a member of the public, particularly if you will be coming back to your vehicle when it is dark. Again, mobile phones should be charged and on returning to your vehicle after leaving the building, undertake a dynamic risk assessment – who is in the area, how does it make you feel. It may be advisable to have your keys to hand or easily accessible; park your vehicle in the direction you will leave as this will avoid unnecessary manoeuvring; lock your vehicle as soon as you enter it and park under a streetlight or in a well-lit area where possible.

8. SOCIAL MEDIA

- 8.1 Social media has become an every-day communications tool for councils, councillors, and the people they represent. The potential is huge and allows you to be innovative and responsive as well as providing links to useful information or other organisations.
- 8.2 Councillor's personal social media channels are their responsibility and subject to the Council's Code of Conduct and Councillors and different social media platforms allow for different types of interactions. It is useful to indicate the aims and intended audiences of your different accounts.

- 8.3 Again, individuals can use social media as a means expressing themselves and this can sometimes come across as negative or aggressive in tone, especially if the topic is emotive or of heightened public interest or engagement.
- 8.4 Advice is available from the Council's Communications teams and an overview of social media and guide to the role of Councillors on social media can be found on the LGA website at [Social media guidance for councillors | Local Government Association](#)

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