

PERSONAL SAFETY A GUIDE FOR COUNCILLORS

The relationship between councillors and the communities they serve is at the heart of what being a councillor is all about. The face-to-face contact when constituents can share problems and concerns is vital to making that relationship work. The following advice is based on the guidance issued by the Local Government Association and aims to help councillors carry out their role safely and effectively.

Introduction

The purpose of this guide is not to raise unnecessary anxiety, but to set out what personal safety measures can be taken to prevent and deal with those rare circumstances when they might find themselves in situations where they become concerned for their safety.

Councillors are encouraged to:

- assess the risks to personal safety in carrying out their public duties;
- recognise potential danger from personal contact or internet / postal communication and take appropriate action;
- be proactive in considering personal safety through, for instance, the use of a lone working device (Reliance Device*), ensuring your partner, a friend or a relative has information on your activities, and ensuring your mobile telephone is charged; and
- if possible, vary daily routines, such as leaving and returning home at different times or via different routes.

*A Reliance Device is a discreet device which allows for communication with the Resilience Call Centre and / or emergency services. When activated during an incident, the device provides information by a pre-set user activated amber alert detailing the location via GPS and will automatically record sound, which can be used as vital evidence. If you would like a Reliance Device, please contact Democratic Services. You will receive training on how to use and maintain the device.

Ward Surgeries

Each councillor's arrangements will vary according to local circumstances and it is unlikely that each councillor can use a venue for their surgery, which meet every aspect of good practice. What follows are suggestions about how to make a surgery safe and effective.

- **Do not hold surgeries alone in an otherwise empty building.** Try and get someone to assist you. This not only makes you safer, but also makes it much easier to manage a busy surgery. If you are currently doing surgeries alone, discuss how this can be changed with fellow councillors or officers.
- **Consider the room layout.** For example, you should sit nearest the door with the constituents seated on the other side of the table. The chairs are best set out at an angle of 45 degrees as sitting directly opposite someone can be seen as confrontational.
- **Considering the waiting area.** If there is no separate waiting room, try to ensure that the waiting constituents are as far away as possible from those whom you are talking to.
- **Try to make sure there are no heavy items or any other objects in the room that could be used as weapons.**
- **Check mobile phone signal and charge.** Before the surgery commences, check your mobile phone signal in case you need to use it in an emergency. Also, see if you can use a landline.
- **Consider using a Reliance Device.** If you would like the additional personal safety assurance, please contact Democratic Services, who can provide a Reliance Device. This is a device issued to frontline employees, which can be switched on and links directly with the police and is also a recording device to ensure that there is a record of any incident. Training will be provided.
- **Know what to do in an emergency.** It would be good practice for you or any helpers to know what to do in an emergency.
- **Record any incidents.** This should include all types of unacceptable behaviour. Records of incidents should be dated, timed and signed. Please report any incidents of unacceptable behaviour to the Democratic Services Team.

If you are looking for suitable places in which to hold a surgery, try to get a venue:

- where there are other people about;
- where the names of any visitors are recorded;
- where there is a designated waiting area;
- where the meeting is in view of the reception or public area and is connected (if possible) to the reception by an alarm and there is a procedure for dealing with calls for assistance, and there is a vision panel in the door;
- where the meeting room has a means of escape and any visitors are not able to lock the door from the inside.

If you are unsure about what venues are available in your ward, please contact Democratic Services, who may be able to advise.

Visits by Constituents to City Hall

If you decide to meet any constituent at City Hall, either as a planned appointment or unannounced, it is recommended that you request Democratic Services to book a meeting room for you. You may request that an officer accompanies you with the constituent – even if they wait outside the door whilst the meeting takes place so that they are on hand should assistance be required.

Dealing with a Variety of Behaviours

Try to be calmness in the face of whatever comes up. If you are subjected to offensive, threatening, intimidating, racist, homophobic or derogatory remarks, you are within your rights to bring the meeting to an end and seek assistance. It is recommended that you take a detailed note of the incident and person(s) involved and inform the Anti-Social Behaviour Team and the Democratic Services Team of the incident. You may also wish to inform Lincolnshire Police.

Some constituents may have additional needs or a mental health condition, and it is important that they are still able to seek advice and representation from their councillors. Advice on supporting such constituents is available from a number of organisations, including the Autistic Society and Mind.

Home Visits

If you conduct any home visits:

- try to visit during normal working and daylight hours;
- Let other people the timing and location of your visit, what time to expect you back, your contact details, who you are seeing, when you have finished your visit and away from the site; and keep a record of your whereabouts.

If necessary, you can let the person you are visiting know there is such a record or that you are expected at another place by a certain time etc or make a call on your mobile phone during the visit.

If necessary, councillors can contact the Democratic Services Team who will arrange for the Violence to Employee database to be checked and to also contact the Anti-Social Behaviour Team to see if there are any known issues.

Personal Callers to Councillors' Private Homes

Publicity by the Council as to how to contact councillors and details of ward surgeries reduces the chances of unwanted callers.

It is recommended to check who is at the door and to keep your home and property secure. If you would like any additional advice on home security, please contact the Democratic Services Team.

In the event of an incident, please record as much detail as you can, including descriptions, should you decide to take any action over the matter. If you are concerned, report the incident to the Anti-Social Behaviour Team and the Democratic Services Team. You might also want to notify Lincolnshire Police.

Telephone Calls

If you receive any malicious, nuisance or abusive calls:

- try to keep the caller talking;
- note any clues the caller may provide as to sex, age, accent etc;
- write down the details immediately to assist police at a later stage; and
- inform the Democratic Services Team who will then pass all the information to the Anti-Social Behaviour Team.

Mail and E-mails

Any malicious or abusive letters or e-mails should be reported to the Democratic Services Team. Do not dispose of the letter, or delete the email, as these can be used as evidence.

Reporting Incidents

Any incidents of concern, even if fairly minor, should be reported to the Democratic Services Team so that an Incident Report can be completed. This enables the authority to undertake proper monitoring and decide if any action is needed to prevent a recurrence. You may also want to advise neighbouring ward colleagues of such incidents.

If you have been subject to or witnessed a hate incident or crime you have a duty to report it. By taking appropriate action you may help to prevent a similar incident recurring.

Notification of Known Violent Customers

Occasionally, the Democratic Services Team is notified of individuals who “pose a risk” to council employees. In these circumstances, an email will be sent to the relevant ward councillors. This will be basic information – name, address of person, age and description (if known). However, enough information will be provided to prevent a councillor from putting themselves at risk. If, on receiving such an email, you have any doubts or would like some further advice please contact the Democratic Services Team. In addition, if you have any concerns about a particular property, then you can contact Corporate Health and Safety to check if there are any flags on the system.

Terrorist-level threats

Although the purpose of this guide is not to cover this in detail, it provides a good opportunity to highlight the current safety advice should an incident occur.

The main 'Stay Safe' principles are to "Run – Hide – Tell". If you require more information, please visit the National Counter Terrorism Support Office's website.

Anyone with information about a crime can call 101, 999 in an emergency or the police anti-terrorist hotline on 0800 789 321.

Other Guidance

Local Authorities have responsibilities for the safety of councillors while on council business as they do for officers. If you would like any further guidance or specific assistance, please do not hesitate to contact Democratic Services.