
Member Development – Bury Council

Personal safety guidance for Elected Members

Revised Member Safety Guidance

March 2022

• Background

Following the death of the Member of Parliament David Amess, the Chief Executive requested a Member Safety group be established; the membership included – the Labour whip, Conservative whip, Mayor and Councillor Mason. The primary function of the Group would be to review current safety guidance supported by the Monitoring Officer and Democratic Services; the group met on the 9th December 2021.

The purpose of the first meeting was to take soundings from Elected Members as to the nature and extent of their safety concerns. Following the first meeting Members fed back to their respective groups. On speaking to Officers and taking soundings from Elected Members, Members did not express any overt safety concerns but agreed revised safety guidance would be welcomed.

Below are details of recommended actions to assist Elected Members, further information and support can be provided by Democratic Services, the Monitoring Officer and the Community Safety Partnership.

Managers from the Community Hubs (Details at the end of the document) are additional resource and can provide advice in respect of appropriate venues as well as soft intelligence to assist Elected Members.

Members agreed that revised Member Safety Guidance would be presented to the March meeting of Full Council.



1. Introduction

All Elected Members deal with residents' concerns sometimes by phone or email and sometimes face to face. Those individuals can feel upset and angry and in extreme circumstances may lead to Members feeling concerned about their safety.

Detailed below are some suggested actions that Members may wish to consider to mitigate and alleviate some of their safety concerns. Most of suggestions are common sense but if Members remain concerned, please do not hesitate to contact Democratic Services and/or the Council's Monitoring Officer.

• Ward Surgeries

- Choose your venue carefully (A busy community centre, library or where there will be other people using the building at the same time). Avoid holding your ward surgery in an empty venue or in a room where you could be locked in.
- Plan and schedule all your meetings and notify democratic services, they can put surgery details on your Councillor pages on the Council website.
- Advertise your ward surgeries and stick to it, that way your constituents will always know where you will be during this time. Inform a family member or someone from your Political Group that is where you will be.
- Consider room layout, keeping entrance and exits clear at all times. The layout of the room needs to suit you – constituents should be seated across a table from you with you sitting nearest to the door.
- Have your mobile (fully charged) with you at all times.
- Do not hold ward surgeries on your own, where possible hold them with other ward Members, or others eg GMP or community Groups

• Making Home Visits

- Councillors do not have to undertake home visits and must avoid home visits if you have concerns about your safety. Use alternatives – try to encourage constituents to meet you in a public place or take a colleague. You can also book a room in advance in the Town Hall to meet residents.
- Keep a record of your appointment in your diary or electronic calendar which includes name/address/ telephone number of the constituent you are visiting.
- Understand the reason for the personal visit and try to get some information from Officers prior to your visit; not only does this make the meeting more meaningful, it may also highlight any personal safety concerns others have had in the past.
- Think about where and how you park your car – if possible, park close to the property you're visiting under a lit streetlight and in the direction that you will be going at the end of your visit.
- Use a system to make sure people know where you are and the estimated time of your return.
- When conducting a home visit always sit nearest to the door that you came in.

• Receiving Personal Callers

- Discourage constituents from coming to your home.
- Keep your diary/phone with you so that you can organise an alternative appointment and venue there and then—or make arrangements to phone them.
- Try to maintain distance.
- Remember – even though you are a Councillor you are still entitled to a personal life.
- If you have concerns about the publishing of your home address, you can use the Town Hall address instead—speak to Democratic Services.

• Receiving abusive phone calls/ social media posts

- Remember, you have the choice to hang up.
- If you choose to keep talking, try to get clues to identify the caller's gender, any accent
- Always try 1471 to see if the number is available.
- Take notes.
- If you receive abusive or prolific emails, texts or messages via social media that give you cause for concern about your safety in the first instance all issues need to be logged with GMP to create a case number. If there is immediate threat to life or property, 999, if not 101, also notify democratic services, to enable them to keep a record and if necessary, provide advice and support.
- Stop all communication with them.
- Seek advice on blocking messages from that person.
- Inform Democratic Services, Group Leader/Group Whip and/or police depending on the seriousness.

• Key issues and support available

- Keep your mobile phone with you at all times and make sure that the battery is charged regularly.
- Plan your meetings. Weigh up the risks in any situation and take action appropriately.
- Always make sure that someone is aware of your whereabouts and your estimated time of return.
- Retain control of situations, keep calm, and avoid confrontation.
- Trust your instincts – if you feel uncomfortable or intimidated make your excuses and leave.
- Consider any health issues you may have and how this may impact on how you meet constituents.
- Avoid putting yourself into a situation which you think your personal safety could be compromised.
- Record and report incidents to the Council initially to Democratic Services and more serious incidents to GMP (see above)
- Town Hall security staff will be present at all Public Meetings held at the Town Hall
- The Council operates a wellbeing system for staff and Elected Members If you feel you may want to access it please contact Democratic Services.
- Further advice in respect of additional home security can be provided by Democratic Services / The Council's Emergency Response and Resilience Team.
- Further advice in respect of vexatious complainants can be provided by the Council's Monitoring Officer.

3. Further information

If you would like further information in relation to the Council Procedure Rules or additional information in respect of the Constitution, please contact:

Jacqui Dennis, Council Monitoring Officer – J.Dennis@bury.gov.uk

OR

Julie Gallagher, Head of Democratic Services – Julie.gallagher@bury.gov.uk

Managers of the Community Hubs are available to assist elected members in providing information, support and advice:

North (Elton, North Manor, Ramsbottom, Tottington) – Tracey Coatman

West (Church and all Radcliffe wards) – Samantha Barber

East (East ward, Moorside, Redvales) – Jamie Walker

Whitefield (Besses, Pilkington Park and Unsworth) – Elizabeth Hinchcliffe

Prestwich (Holyrood, Sedgley, St. Mary's) – Warren Rafferty

This report should be read in conjunction with the Council Member Social Media guidance.