
Member Development – Bury Council

Personal safety guidance for Elected Members

Member Safety Guidance

Background

This guide has been co-produced by Officers working alongside Members appointed to the Member Development Group. A pressing concern facing those in public office is the increasing levels of intimidation, harassment and abuse they are experiencing. While debate and expressing different views is all part of a healthy representative democracy, these unacceptable behaviors undermine the key democratic principles of free speech, debate and engagement, and sometimes pose a risk to councillors' safety.

Bury Council adopts a zero tolerance approach to abuse, intimidation, harassment, and threatening behaviour towards Elected Members. Healthy debate is welcome, but abusive conduct online or offline will not be tolerated and will be escalated through appropriate channels, including GMP under Operation Ford where applicable.

Councillors, their peers, political parties, council officers and, when necessary, the police, all have a role to play in addressing harassment, abuse, and intimidation. Members are encouraged to reflect upon their safety and use this guide accordingly.

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. If Members remain concerned, please do not hesitate to contact Democratic Services and/or the Council's Monitoring Officer.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

Elected Members: Plan activities, assess risks, follow this guidance, report incidents promptly, and use council-approved systems.

Democratic Services: Maintain records of reported incidents, provide advice, coordinate support (including wellbeing), and manage publication of surgery details.

Monitoring Officer: Advise on vexatious complainants and legal considerations; coordinate with GMP and relevant services when appropriate.

Community Safety Partnership / GMP Liaison: Provide advice on personal safety and security; receive and act on incident reports as required.

Communications & IT: Support with social media protocols, privacy settings, technical controls, and use of council-approved platforms.



3. Core Guidance

Key Principles for Member Safety

The Council's approach to Member safety is based on the following principles:

- Zero tolerance of abuse and intimidation
- Clear, simple reporting routes
- Strong partnership working with GMP, the Force Elected Official Adviser (FEOA), and community partners
- Member wellbeing as a priority
- Supportive processes for managing risk and de-escalation

Ward Surgeries

When holding ward surgeries, it is important to prioritise both safety and accessibility. Councillors should choose their venue carefully, selecting a busy, well used location such as a community centre or library where other people are present. Surgeries should not take place in isolated or empty buildings, nor in rooms where you could be locked in or left without immediate support.

You should plan and schedule your surgeries in advance and notify Democratic Services, who can add the details to your Councillor page on the Council website. Once advertised, it is important to maintain consistency by sticking to the agreed dates and times so that constituents know when and where you will be available. It is also good practice to inform a family member or someone from your Political Group of your whereabouts and the duration of your surgery.

Room layout should be arranged with personal safety in mind. Ensure entrances and exits remain clear, and position yourself so that you sit nearest to the door, with constituents seated across a table from you. Always keep your mobile phone fully charged and easily accessible during the session.

Finally, you should avoid conducting ward surgeries alone. Wherever possible, hold them jointly with other ward councillors, or with representatives from organisations such as GMP or local community groups. Having another person present enhances safety and provides additional support, particularly when complex or sensitive matters arise.

Making Home Visits

When undertaking home visits, councillors should be aware that they are not obliged to carry them out, and visits should always be avoided if there are any concerns about personal safety. Wherever possible, consider alternative arrangements such as encouraging constituents to meet in a public place, bringing a colleague with you, or booking a meeting room at the Town Hall in advance.

It is important to keep an accurate record of any scheduled home visit. Your diary or electronic calendar entry should include the constituent's name, address, and telephone number, as well as the date and time of the appointment. Before the visit, ensure you understand the reason for the meeting and, where appropriate, seek background information from Officers. This helps make the meeting more productive and may also highlight any previous safety concerns or relevant context.

When travelling to the visit, think carefully about where and how you park your car. If possible, park close to the property, under a streetlight if visiting in the evening, and in a position that allows you to leave easily at the end of the meeting. You should also use a system, formal or informal, that ensures someone knows where you are and what time you expect to return.

During the home visit itself, always position yourself so that you are seated nearest to the door through which you entered. This simple measure provides an additional level of safety and ensures you are able to exit quickly if needed.

Lone Working Protocols

Lone working arrangements should always be supported by the dedicated Lone Working appendix, which must be read alongside this guidance. The appendix outlines how Members should use council approved applications or systems to complete wellbeing checkins, share their itineraries, and raise alerts where necessary. This approach also aligns with the ongoing review of council spaces to ensure that safe and secure meeting locations are available for Members.

Members should use council approved lone working or wellbeing applications to record their start and end times, their locations, and any scheduled checkins throughout their activities. Before undertaking surgeries, home visits, or canvassing, Members are expected to share their itinerary, including time, location, and expected duration with Democratic Services or their Group Whip. Wherever possible, Council buildings or preapproved community venues should be used, as these locations offer staff presence, clearer safety arrangements, and established security procedures.

To further support personal safety, Members should identify a "buddy" who agrees to check in with them if they have not confirmed safe completion of their activity by a prearranged time. Members should always carry a fully charged phone and, during higher risk activities, ensure that location sharing is enabled within council approved applications. If a lone working alert is triggered, the escalation process must be followed in the correct order: first contacting the nominated buddy, then Democratic Services, and escalating to Security or GMP where appropriate.

Receiving Personal Callers

Constituents should be discouraged from coming to your home, as this can compromise personal safety and blur the boundaries between public responsibilities and private life. If

someone does arrive unexpectedly, keep your diary or phone with you so that you can arrange an alternative appointment at a safer venue or, if more appropriate, offer to contact them by phone instead. It is important to maintain a reasonable physical distance and manage the interaction calmly and professionally.

Councillors should remember that, despite their public role, they are fully entitled to a private personal life and do not need to receive callers at their home. If you have any concerns about your home address being published, the Town Hall address can be used instead. Democratic Services can support you with this and make the necessary updates where required.

Receiving abusive phone calls and social media posts

If you receive an abusive or distressing phone call, remember that you always have the option to end the call immediately. If you decide to continue speaking, you may find it useful to listen for any details that could help identify the caller, such as their gender or accent. After the call, you should try using 1471 to see whether the number is available, and it is good practice to make contemporaneous notes of anything said.

Where abuse comes through emails, texts, or social media messages and causes you concern for your safety, the matter must be logged with GMP in the first instance so that a case number can be created. If there is an immediate threat to life or property, you should contact 999; for nonurgent concerns, use 101. Democratic Services should also be notified so the incident can be recorded and support or advice can be provided if required.

Once abusive contact has been received, you should cease all communication with the individual and seek advice on how to block their number or account. Depending on the seriousness of the situation, you should inform Democratic Services, your Group Leader, your Group Whip, and/or the police so that the incident can be properly documented and escalated where necessary.

Indicators requiring immediate escalation to GMP:

- Threats of violence
- Fixation behaviour
- Repeated unwanted contact
- Discriminatory abuse (racist, misogynistic, homophobic etc.)
- Publication of private information not already public (doxing)

Social Media Harassment

Where possible, you should always use your council email account when corresponding with members of the public or officers, and you should avoid publishing any personal details or engaging in direct correspondence with individuals through public social media channels. This helps to maintain appropriate boundaries and reduces the risk of personal information being misused.

If you encounter harassment on social media, you should follow the agreed escalation process. This involves capturing evidence such as screenshots, URLs and timestamps, then reporting the content directly to the platform. You should also inform the Communications team and log the incident with GMP, using 999 if there is an immediate threat or 101 for nonurgent cases. Taking these steps ensures the issue is formally recorded and the appropriate support or action can be taken.

You should regularly review your privacy settings on all social platforms—ideally on a quarterly basis—to control who can view your posts, tag you or send messages, and to ensure that geotagging or location-sharing features are disabled. As part of good data minimisation practices, councillors should avoid posting personal phone numbers, home addresses, daily routines or any information relating to family members.

When managing your online presence, official correspondence should always be conducted using your council email address. Personal accounts should not be linked to councillor pages, and multifactor authentication should be enabled wherever possible. You may also wish to ask IT to assist with security controls such as password managers, device encryption and the blocking or filtering of unwanted contacts, along with ensuring that your profiles are as secure as possible.

Finally, the Communications team can support you in navigating challenging online interactions by advising on tone, helping you determine when it is appropriate not to engage, and preparing holding statements where necessary. Their input can be particularly valuable during periods of heightened public attention or when dealing with particularly persistent online harassment.

Election & Campaign Period Safety

During election and campaign periods, Members and campaigners typically undertake increased public activity, including canvassing and attending events, which can create additional safety considerations. It is important to follow established safety measures and reflect best practice from across Greater Manchester authorities to ensure that campaign activity is carried out responsibly and safely.

Wherever possible, canvassing should not be conducted alone. Pairing with a colleague provides both support and an additional layer of security, and it is sensible to agree a buddy checkin system so that someone is aware of your movements and expected return time. Your party office should always be informed of your intended routes, the areas you plan to visit, and the times you expect to be there. If plans change while you are out, you should share live updates so that your whereabouts remain known.

When working in the evenings or at times when visibility may be low, you should ensure you carry appropriate items such as photo ID, a fully charged mobile phone, and a small torch or sufficient lighting. You should avoid entering homes while canvassing; instead, if a resident needs a further conversation, arrange a followup meeting in a public venue or Council building where it is safer to hold discussions.

Be observant when approaching properties. Signs such as “No cold callers” or anything indicating hostility should be respected, and you should move on promptly if you encounter them. Dress in a way that prioritises safety, opting for suitable shoes and weather appropriate clothing, and avoid wearing valuables or prominent party branding in areas where tensions may be heightened.

If at any point you are confronted, feel threatened, or believe you are being followed, you should leave the area immediately.

For any immediate threat to your safety or that of others, call 999. For nonurgent but concerning situations, contact 101 and ensure the incident is reported to your party office and Democratic Services.

During campaign periods, candidate details may be shared with GMP's FEOA to enable proactive security advice. Candidates must ensure they provide up to date contact details to the Returning Officer. As part of Operation Ford Candidates will be contacted by the Police and offered a safety briefing, it is strongly recommended by the Council that members attend this training and offer of support.

Finally, it is essential to maintain good data protection practices throughout campaigning. Do not record sensitive personal data on your own devices, and use only approved systems and secure storage methods provided by the Council or your party.

Responding to Misinformation

Debate Not Hate reports that more than half of councillors have experienced misinformation campaigns. Members experiencing misinformation or false statements online should:

- Notify the Communications Team for advice
- Capture evidence (screenshots, URLs)
- Avoid direct engagement where escalation is likely
- Report coordinated harassment to GMP (as Operation Ford incidents)
- Request a holding statement or factual correction if appropriate

Hybrid/Online Meeting Risks

Hybrid and online meetings are increasingly used by elected members as a flexible and efficient way to engage with residents, officers, and partner organisations. When organising or attending these meetings, it is important to apply appropriate safeguarding and data protection measures. This includes ensuring that, where recordings are required, explicit consent is obtained in advance. Meetings should always be hosted on council approved platforms, which offer secure features such as waiting rooms or lobbies to control public access, and ensure that software remains up to date.

If a meeting is to be recorded, explicit consent must be obtained from all participants, and any recordings should be stored securely on council systems in line with the relevant retention policies. Technical controls should be enabled so that attendees cannot share their screens by default, and file transfers should be restricted. Private chat functions should be limited or disabled where necessary, and a moderator should be appointed to manage the meeting, particularly when a large or mixed group of participants is expected.

Access to online meetings should be managed carefully. Where appropriate, require registration, display a meeting code of conduct, and remove participants who behave disruptively, ensuring that any incidents are recorded. Members should also consider their own privacy by using blurred or neutral backgrounds, checking what is visible on camera, and avoiding showing personal surroundings.

Safeguarding responsibilities are especially important when meetings involve young people. An appropriate officer should always be present during youth sessions, and all DBS and consent requirements must be followed. Under no circumstances should 1:1 unsupervised virtual meetings be held with under18s. These measures help ensure that online engagement remains safe, professional, and compliant with council and statutory requirements.

Youth Engagement Safety

When engaging with under18s, such as members of the Youth Cabinet or care leavers, it is essential that all safeguarding expectations are met. An officer or responsible adult must always be present during these engagements, and councillors should not hold onetoone meetings with young people unless appropriate safeguarding measures and formal consent are in place. Ensuring a safe and suitable venue is also crucial; interactions should take place in Council buildings or other approved venues that operate safeguarding policies and have appropriate facilities.

Parental or guardian consent must be obtained in writing for participation, and where relevant, for any photography or recording that may take place. Councillors should also consider whether their role or the activity requires a DBS check. Where a DBS check is necessary—whether enhanced or standard—it must be completed before any engagement goes ahead, and advice should be sought from HR or Democratic Services if there is any uncertainty.

All conduct should remain professional and age appropriate. Councillors should avoid sharing personal contact details and should communicate only through council email addresses and platforms. If any safeguarding concerns arise during or after the interaction, they must be recorded immediately and reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead and Democratic Services. Serious concerns, or those suggesting a risk of harm, should be escalated without delay to GMP or Children’s Services in line with statutory safeguarding responsibilities.

Reporting & Escalation

When reporting any crime or safety concern to the police, Members must clearly state that the incident relates to their role as an elected councillor and should be recorded as an “Operation Ford incident.” This ensures appropriate triage, intelligence sharing, and security response through the Force Elected Official Adviser (FEOA).

GMP has appointed a dedicated **FEOA** to coordinate threat assessments, provide personal security advice, and share intelligence relevant to councillor safety. Contact details will be provided to all Members and included in induction materials.

1. **Emergency:** Call 999 and state **Operation Ford incident**
2. **Nonemergency:** Call 101 and state **Operation Ford incident**
3. Notify Democratic Services
4. Retain evidence and record the incident
5. Where appropriate, inform your Group Leader/Group Whip and the Monitoring Officer.
6. Retain evidence: emails, messages, call logs, photos/screenshots, and any notes.

Town Hall security presence: Security staff are present at all public meetings held at the Town Hall.

Wellbeing support: The Council operates a wellbeing system for staff; contact Democratic Services to access it.

Vexatious complainants: Seek advice from the Monitoring Officer on managing persistent complainants

Wellbeing After Incidents

Members who experience abuse or intimidation may access confidential wellbeing support. A wellbeing referral can be made through Democratic Services. Councillors have access to the Council's employee wellbeing offer on Vivup which provides access to expert support and counselling 24/7, 365 days a year: [Employee Assistance Programme](#).

In The Moment Support



A type of counselling or support that is provided in real-time, at the very moment when a person is experiencing a particular issue, emotional distress, or crisis

Need to talk? Call us on **0330 380 0658**



24/7 Telephone Support



Speak in confidence to fully qualified counsellors and support specialists 24/7, 365 days a year to discuss any emotional, personal or work-related issues.

Need to talk? Call us on **0330 380 0658**



Appendices

Appendix A:

Lone Working Protocol

This Lone Working Protocol applies to all situations in which councillors may be undertaking activities alone, including ward surgeries, home visits, canvassing, and any other circumstances where they may be meeting residents or members of the public without direct support. Its purpose is to ensure personal safety, maintain good safeguarding practice, and provide a clear framework for managing and escalating concerns.

Before beginning any loneworking activity, councillors should complete a simple itinerary that includes the planned time, location, and expected duration of the activity. This information should be shared with Democratic Services or the relevant Group Whip, and clear checkin times should be agreed in advance. Where council approved lone working systems or wellbeing applications are in place—such as those offering location sharing, checkin prompts, or panic alert functionality—these should be used in line with Council policy and best practice.

A buddy system must be established for all loneworking activities. A designated buddy should be informed of the planned activity and expected timings, and should be responsible for checking in if the councillor does not confirm their safety at the agreed times. The buddy also plays a key role in the escalation process if a checkin is missed.

Where a faceto face meeting is taking place, councillors should carry out a basic venue check to ensure it is suitable. Staffed venues are always preferable, and councillors should confirm that access and exit routes are clear and that there is a safe waiting area if required. This is particularly important for evening work or visits in less familiar locations.

At the conclusion of any loneworking activity, councillors must confirm their safe completion by notifying their buddy or closing the activity within the approved system. Any concerns, unusual interactions, or incidents must be reported promptly to Democratic Services so they can be recorded and followed up where necessary.

If a planned checkin is missed, the escalation process should be followed immediately. The buddy should first attempt to contact the councillor by phone or text. If contact cannot be made, Democratic Services must be notified without delay. Should there be continued inability to make contact, or any reason to believe the councillor may be at risk, the matter should be escalated to Council Security or /Greater Manchester Police as appropriate.

Appendix B:

Risk Assessment Checklist – Surgeries & Visits

Councillors are encouraged to display Respect & Civility signage at surgeries and events, signalling expected standards of behaviour.

- Venue is staffed and open to the public; reception/security present.
- Room layout provides clear lines of sight; you are seated nearest the exit.
- Entrances/exits are clear and unlocked; emergency routes identified.

- Lighting is adequate inside and outside; parking is well-lit and close.
- Mobile phone fully charged; emergency contacts accessible.
- Lone-working app/system active; itinerary shared; buddy assigned.
- Another Member/colleague present where possible.
- Accessibility needs considered (step-free access, hearing loops, accessible toilets).
- Data protection in place (no personal papers left unattended; devices secured).
- Incident recording materials available (notes template, secure storage).
- Safeguarding considerations addressed (no 1:1 with under-18s; officer present).
- Equality and respect signage/code of conduct displayed if appropriate.
- Contingency plan if the meeting becomes confrontational (exit strategy, security contact).

Appendix C:

Virtual Meetings Safeguarding Checklist

- Council-approved platform used; latest version installed.
- Waiting room/lobby enabled for public sessions.
- Recording consent obtained and recorded; storage on council systems only.
- Screen sharing disabled for attendees; moderator assigned.
- Chat moderated; private messaging restricted if appropriate.
- Participant code of conduct shared at start; disruptive participants removed.
- Neutral/blurred background used; personal information not visible.
- Officer present for sessions involving under-18s; DBS checked where required.
- Incident reporting route documented; evidence captured if needed.

Appendix D:

Youth Engagement Protocol & DBS Guidance

- Activities involving under-18s require safeguarding oversight and, where appropriate, DBS checks (standard or enhanced).
- Ensure an officer or responsible adult is present; avoid unsupervised 1:1 engagements.
- Obtain parental/guardian consent for participation and for any recording/photography.
- Use council email and approved platforms; do not share personal contact details.
- Follow data protection guidance when handling young people's information (minimise collection; secure storage).
- Report safeguarding concerns immediately to the Designated Safeguarding Lead; escalate to Children's Services/GMP where necessary.

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 Rachel Everitt, Governance, Elections and Land Charges Manager – R.Everitt@bury.gov.uk

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

Key Contacts

- Democratic Services: democratic.services@bury.gov.uk
- Communications Team: communications@bury.gov.uk / 0161 253 5120
- IT Service Desk: servdesk@bury.gov.uk / 0161 253 5050
- GMP (Greater Manchester Police): Emergency 999 / Non-emergency 101
- Security (Town Hall): emergencycontrol@bury.gov.uk / 0161 253 6606

This guidance will be presented to Full Council and reviewed annually. Feedback from Members and Officers is welcomed.

