



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

8th NOVEMBER 2021

MEMBERS SAFETY / SECURITY

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES & COMMUNICATION.

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an update in respect of the provisions available to ensure Members safety / security when undertaking their role and to consider any improvements that can be take forward.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that Members:

- (i) Acknowledge the support provided to Members to ensure Members safety and security both in a physical and online context
- (ii) Consider the proposals to further advance these support arrangements as outlined within section 6 of the report
- (iii) Consider any additional support arrangements that could be provided to Members.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 An important role of an Elected Member is to keep in touch with their residents and communities, which includes communication via telephone, email, social media, virtual meetings and face to face contact with constituents, for example, by holding ward surgeries, making visits to people's homes, or when receiving people at their own homes.

3.2 Most Councillors will not experience any problems when meeting with their constituents, and even when they do experience aggression or other forms of unacceptable behaviour, it will usually be of a relatively low level. However, following the recent sad events involving the death of Sir David Amess MP, it is important that we as a Council consider and re - evaluate the support and security provisions available to Elected Members.

4. UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR

- 4.1 It is important that Elected Members recognise what is unacceptable behaviour. Members throughout their term of office are likely to have to deal with unpleasant or challenging interaction on occasion with residents in their community.
- 4.2 With the rise of usage in social media platforms written and online abuse is another avenue of abuse that Elected Members are potentially subjected to. Whilst most of the aggression councillors experience will usually sit at the 'low to modest' spectrum of unacceptable behaviour, severe abuse can tip into the legal definition of violence even if no physical interaction is involved.
- 4.3 Intimidation affects people differently but can significantly affect an individual's physical and mental health. Intimidation against Elected Members whether in person or through online abuse undermines representative democracy, stifles debate and threatens the integrity of democratic structures. It can also discourage those who may wish to represent their community in being involved in the Council, potentially impairing the diversity and vibrancy of representative democracy.
- 4.4 It is important that if a Member does feel threatened or that they are subject to unacceptable behaviour that they know how to report this behaviour as potentially criminal behaviour. Members are encouraged to contact South Wales Police through the following mechanisms:

- Call 101
- Report online via the South Wales Police Website 'Report' tool at <https://www.south-wales.police.uk/ro/report/>
- Email SWP101@south-wales.police.uk
- Private message via Facebook South Wales Police - Home | Facebook
- Private message via Twitter South Wales Police@SWP101

- 4.5 If a Member feels that any of the behaviours they have endured have had an effect on their wellbeing then Members are again reminded of the support arrangements through the Council's Occupational Health arrangements.

5 SUPPORT PROVISIONS.

- 5.1 The Role of an Elected Member is integral to the running of the Council and the Council, through its Council Business Unit and in partnership with the Police and Community Safety team have taken forward a number of support provisions to ensure Members personal safety.
- 5.2 In 2019 the Democratic Services Committee took forward the drafting of a lone working policy for Members as it recognised the need for guidance for all

Members when working alone. This policy was approved by Committee in 2020 and forms part of the Member Induction Programme booklet.

- 5.3 Personal Alarm devices have been made available to all Members upon request and again will be offered as part of the Members Induction Programme. More bespoke security support can be provided to Members as and when necessary, Member's safety is paramount to the Council and there are no defined parameters in place, however the overriding objective to ensure that the appropriate support is made available to provide the necessary safety arrangements for a member and provide the maximum level of reassurance.
- 5.4 Following the receipt of anti-social and challenging behaviour, security provision has been made available at some Members residential address, as a precautionary safety measure.
- 5.5 Publication of Official addresses - The removal of a Members contact details from the Councillor profile page on the Council website has been taken forward upon request for a number of Members, with the Council Business Unit being the point of contact in the first instance for any public correspondence. This arrangement is reviewed periodically by the Head of Democratic Services to ensure a balance between members safety and the provision of accessibility for the public. Going forward, as part of the Local Government Elections Act 2021 a duty will be placed on principal councils to publish an electronic and postal address for each member of the council on its website. A council office address may be used if the member wishes to protect the privacy of their home address.
- 5.6 Provision of a Council email account and telephone provision - Council policy recommends that Members should use their Council email address when contacting residents and officers within the Council, rather than a personal email address. Members are also offered the opportunity to take forward a Council mobile telephone, to allow the public to use as a key contact provision, rather than using any personal mobile number.
- 5.7 Previously, prior to the virtual way of working, members will be aware that little security provision is available both physically as deterrent or in terms of protection for members and officers. While it is considered that that safety provision available is proportionate currently, the Democratic Services Committee of the next Council, may wish to consider strengthening these arrangements, once hybrid meetings arrangements are fully enabled.
- 5.8 Members have been provided with a number of social media training opportunities to help with the managing of their Council social media accounts. Members are strongly advised to take forward a separate Councillor account and refrain from sharing any personal information on this account with their own personal social media platforms. A social Media policy has also been developed and is shared with Members during induction.
- 5.9 Infographics to assist Members with online civility have been promoted by the Council Business Unit, for Members to utilise.



5.10 Other resources for Councillors to utilise in respect of personal safety and online abuse are listed below:

- **Councillors' guide to handling intimidation | Local Government Association (Welsh version)**
- **Personal safety | Local Government Association (Welsh version)**
- **'Rules of engagement' infographic for councillors** to use on social media to give all users a clear 'code' by which they should operate (also in Welsh)
- **'Rules of engagement' infographic for candidates** to use on social media to give all users a clear 'code' by which they should operate (also in Welsh)
- **'Handling online abuse' infographic** - a quick reference guide for councillors with steps they can take to protect themselves online and seek support where needed. (also in Welsh)
- **Improving digital citizenship: A practical guide for councillors | Local Government Association (Welsh version)**
- **Research and Good Practice Improving digital citizenship: Research and good practice | Local Government Association (Welsh version)**

5.11 Members have been provided with police contact details by the Police / Community Safety Partnership to assist in dealing with any challenging or anti-social behaviour in the first instance and these have been recently circulated to Members following a Members briefing session taken forward on the 2nd November.

5.12 Police guidance as to how to deal with intimidating behaviour has also been provided to Members in respect of the following:

- 'Protect yourself Guide Blue Booklet'
- Crime Prevention Survey - [Accredited Product Search \(securedbydesign.com\)](https://www.securedbydesign.com/)
- Safety App's on mobile devices

- Dealing with aggressive behaviour- skillsyouneed.com/ps/dealing-with-aggression.html

5.13 A copy of the presentation is also attached to this report for information and will be shortly circulated to all Members.

6. **REVIEW OF SUPPORT PROVISION**

6.1 In light of the support already available, the following review opportunities are suggested to strengthen the support arrangements available. It is also important to note that the provision of security for Members is recognised within the Draft IRP Annual report:

“As a result of their role as a councillor an elected member’s personal security may become adversely affected. It is the duty of Democratic Services Committees to fund or provide support necessary to enable a councillor to discharge their role reasonably and safely. This may require funding appropriate security measures to protect councillors from personal risk or significant threat. Risk assessment and liaison with relevant bodies such as the police and security services would normally inform the selection of required provision.”

6.2 A Members briefing session in respect of Members Safety, providing details of the support available by the Police and Community Safety Partnership was taken forward on the 2nd November, highlighting the safety provisions available to Members by the Police and the Council including points of contact, as referenced in 5.11 – 5.12 above.

6.3 It is suggested that the Elected Members lone working policy developed by the Democratic Services is reviewed to ensure it is updated to reflect current working practices with virtual working and further advancements with social media abuse.

6.4 The utilisation of Council Offices across the County Borough for Members to access to undertake aspects of their role including the potential for Member surgeries to be scoped by the Council Business Unit and Corporate Estates and reported back to the Democratic Services. The appropriate Risk Assessments would also need to be carried out in respect of such a working arrangement.

6.5 ICT course on ‘Staying Safe in a digital world’ to be taken forward.

6.6 Members are contacted to ensure they are happy with the information available in the public domain, in respect of home address / contact details on the Council website.

6.7 Propose to assist Members with production of flyers to provide to constituents advising them of how they can contact Members going forward.

6.8 The installation of the advised ‘Member Safety tracking App’ by South Wales Police to be installed on all future Member Council Mobile phones.

7 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 7.1 The role of an Elected Member is integral to the effective running of the Council and it is essential that all Members are provided with any support necessary to undertake their role. The Council have pledged to become a diverse Council and therefore it is important that all Members and any future candidates looking to stand as an Elected Member feel safe in taking forward this role.

8 WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no language implications associated with this report.

9 CONSULTATION

- 9.1 The Council Business Unit consult where necessary with the Community Safety partnership to address any security and safety measures required by a Member.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 10.1 Any financial implications associated with Members Safety will be taken forward through existing budgets.

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 outlines a mandatory requirement publication of Official Addresses of Elected Members.

12. LINKS TO CORPORATE AND NATIONAL PRIORITIES AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS ACT.

- 12.1 The role of an Elected Member links to the Corporate Plan priorities with particular reference to people and the need to ensure the safety of both Elected Members and the residents that they serve within the Communities.

13 CONCLUSION

- 13.1 Although there have been very few major incidents involving violence toward local or national politicians, it is important that we ensure that the safety measures in place for our Elected Members are sufficient and fit for purpose, to ensure Members feel comfortable and safe in taking forward their important role and to demonstrate this safety to any future candidate.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

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