



RHONDDA CYNON TAF

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

27TH APRIL 2023

INFORMATION REPORT

INFORMATION REPORT - MEMBERS SAFETY / SECURITY

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

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 7 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, it is important that we as a Council consider and re - evaluate the support and security provisions available to Elected Members.

- 3.3 On the 15th June 2022, Members received a presentation briefing session on Members Wellbeing which included details of Members Safety and wellbeing. A link to this briefing session is available [here](#).

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. Welsh Government have recently advised of Ministers being targeted by activists with hostile behaviour.
- 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. 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 with the Council Business Unit being the point of contact in the first instance for any public correspondence. The Local Government and Elections Act 2021 places a duty 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 to protect the privacy of Members home address.
- 5.6 Members have been provided with 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.
- 5.7 Infographics to assist Members with online civility have been promoted by the Council Business Unit, for Members to utilise.



5.9 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)**

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

- 'Protect yourself Guide Blue Booklet'
- Crime Prevention Survey - [Accredited Product Search \(securedbydesign.com\)](https://www.securedbydesign.com/)
- Dealing with aggressive behaviour- [skillsyouneed.com/ps/dealing-with-aggression.html](https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ps/dealing-with-aggression.html)

6 **CYBER SECURITY**

- 6.1 Through the new ways of working imposed on the Council through the pandemic, and the new statutory required hybrid approaches to meetings, the provision of ICT equipment to Members is now more important than ever.
- 6.2 Post-election, all Members were equipped with a digital device to allow them to undertake their Elected Member role, and to attend Committee meetings via the virtual Zoom platform, with appropriate training provided to each Member through the Council Business Unit and ICT colleagues.
- 6.3 In line with the recommendations of the Independent Review Panel and the decision taken forward by the previous Democratic Services Committee, Members have been provided with mobile telephony provision.
- 6.4 One of the most significant risks we face as a Council is the risk posed by cyber criminals. This risk is detailed on our Council risk register.
- 6.5 One key area is that of digital identity. Unfortunately, Members details are more easily sourced due to the nature of the role they undertake and are listed on the public facing website. Therefore, Members become an easier target for cyber-attacks. By limiting use to trusted Council digital devices this allows the Council to provide access to emails, teams and Council systems to Members, whilst Members are safe in the knowledge that this access is trusted.
- 6.6 Members on Council provided devices are more protected from such attacks, and also cannot be impersonated as they are protected by the Council's cyber security technologies. For the reasons mentioned above, Members will now only be able to access Council emails from a Council digital device. It is for this reason that all Members, by default, were provided with the provision of a mobile telephone from the local elections in May 2022.
- 6.7 Members feedback has been that many Members do not utilise the Telephony provision provided and prefer to utilise their own personal device. Although for security reasons outlined above the Council would encourage the use of the Council mobile provision.
- 6.8 It is suggested that a survey of Members is undertaken to establish the usage of Members devices and to ensure that the correct contact details are displayed on the Council website to assist Members of the public in engaging with Members.

7. **REVIEW OF SUPPORT PROVISION**

- 7.1 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 a previous 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.”

- 7.2 If felt appropriate a Members briefing session in respect of Members Safety, providing details of the support available by the Police and Community Safety Partnership could be taken forward, highlighting the safety provisions available to Members by the Police and the Council including points of contact.
- 7.3 It is suggested that the Elected Members lone working policy developed by the Democratic Services Committee is reviewed to ensure it is updated to reflect current working practices with virtual working and further advancements with social media abuse.
- 7.4 ICT course on Cyber Security and Staying Safe in a digital world to be taken forward.
- 7.5 Members are contacted to ensure they are happy with the information available in the public domain, in respect of contact details on the Council website and Council telephony provision
- 7.6 Information regarding a ‘Member Safety tracking App’ previously advised by South Wales Police to be suggested to Members for installation on Member Council Mobile phones.

8 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS / SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY

- 8.1 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.

9 WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

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

10 CONSULTATION

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

11. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

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

12. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

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

- 13.1 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.

14 CONCLUSION

- 14.1 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.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

AS AMENDED BY

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES COMMITTEE

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, DEMOCRATIC SERVICES &
COMMUNICATION**

MEMBERS SAFETY / SECURITY