



Constitution & General Purposes Committee

6 January 2022

Title	Member Safety Review
Report of	Head of Governance
Wards	All
Status	Public
Urgent	No
Key	No
Enclosures	None
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Summary

The Chairman of the Constitution & General Purposes Committee has requested that officers undertake a review of safety following the killing of Sir David Amess in October 2021 which considers the safety of councillors and the public in council owned premises (Hendon Town Hall, libraries, etc.) and the safety of councillors in pursuit of their public duties in particular Members' surgeries.

Officers Recommendations

1. That the Committee note the actions taken in relation to Member Safety to date.
2. That the Committee review the action areas set out in the report and confirm any additional areas for investigation by officers.

1. Why this report is needed

- 1.1 The Chairman has requested that officers undertake a review of safety following the killing of Sir David Ames in October 2021 which considers the safety of councillors and the public in council owned premises (Hendon Town Hall, libraries, etc.) and the safety

of councillors in pursuit of their public duties in particular Members' surgeries. This report sets out actions that the Council has taken to date and areas for improvement.

Safety of Public and Councillors in Council Owned Premises

- 1.2 At most council owned premises there will be security arrangements in place or there may be council staff present. However, where this is not the case or if the member will be Lone Working; members are advised to consider either changing the venue, time or ensuring that Lone Working risk is mitigated with the presence of another person, or other suitable measures for the duration of the meeting/surgery. Members are also advised to seek and discuss information from the Governance and the MASH team on localised risk, especially where elected members are meeting members of public or holding surgeries without security.
- 1.3 Risk Assessments and safety guidance are in place and have been shared with all councillors and members. It is the individual's responsibility to ensure that they have read and understood the risk assessment and that they follow any control measure identified, as these will be specific for the building being used. Any other unknown or insight into risk or safety concern should be raised with the Governance and Health and Safety service. Risk assessments should be reviewed at least annually or sooner if there have been any significant changes, or any incidents have taken place where the control measures were not suitable and sufficient. All incidents must be recorded and reported to the council and where applicable to the police.
- 1.4 Emergency evacuation plans are in place in all council owned properties and councillors and members must familiarise themselves with these plans especially when using an unfamiliar venue.

Safety of Councillors in Pursuit of Public Duties

- 1.5 Elected Members (or councillors) undertake several roles including:
 - representing a ward;
 - acting as decision-maker (in Council and committees);
 - involved policy and strategy review and development;
 - acting as a community leader and networker;
 - representing the Council on outside bodies and partnerships; and
 - acting as the interface between the Council and residents.
- 1.6 There are many ways in which Members may interface with the community on various issues including (but not limited to):
 - Liaison with residents associations and other local groups;
 - Attending ward surgeries;
 - Dealing with casework (including raising Members Enquiries);
 - Attending mayoral or civic events;
 - Serving on or attending committee meetings, partnerships and/or forums where residents may make representations, present petitions, or attend to hear the debate and the outcome of a decision;

- Attending planning site visits;
- Representing local views at planning and licensing meetings;
- Dealing with locally contentious issues;

1.7 In several of these contexts Members may be in lone working situations which place them at risk.

1.8 Following the murder of MP Jo Cox in June 2016, who had been assassinated by a right-wing extremist on the way to meet her constituents at a routine surgery, the Council identified a requirement to provide advice, guidance, and support to Members on reducing risks associated with attending Members' Surgeries. The importance of work in this area has recently been highlighted by the murder of Sir David Amess in October 2021 whilst attending his constituency surgery in Leigh-on-Sea.

Members' Surgeries Health & Safety Risk Assessments

1.9 During 2016/17, the Governance Service and Health & Safety worked with the political groups to develop and undertake a health and safety risk assessment for Members' surgery venues. The generic risk assessment request Members to consider the following:

Surgery Venues

- familiarisation with the venues' emergency evacuation procedures;
- providing personal alarms on request;
- advising Members to have a charged mobile phone accessible to call the police if required;
- reviewing the venue for safe access/egress, including full access for wheelchair use/people with mobility issues
- recommending the use of an appointment system of booking, so that no unknown visitors will be left alone with the Member
- not displaying valuables;
- recommending that all incidents of physical and non-physical assault be reported;
- recommending that venues with staff present should be used;
- reviewing the venue for potential weapons and removing;
- recommending that rooms with vision panels are used;
- ensuring that visitors are not able to lock doors from the inside, that Members are seated closer to the door than the visitor, and that they are visible to staff outside the room at all times
- recommending that surgery venues have wi-fi and use of a landline telephone/and or reliable mobile phone signal;
- agreeing a 'body code' with a buddy to indicate that the buddy should come and assist by politely asking a person to leave;
- establishing a procedure for reporting suspicious behaviour; and

- reviewing lighting in car parks and paths

Travelling to and From Venues

- not walking through areas where you feel uncomfortable or suspect are unsafe
- sticking to well-lit paths and not taking short cuts
- walking with other people
- inform someone when leaving and/or expected time of arrival
- carry charged mobile phone
- carry personal alarm if preferred
- avoiding entering people's homes and try to meet in a public place until the person is well known to the Member.

Health & Safety

- plan your journey – know where you are going, how you are going to get there, not working out of hours, considering using a buddy,
- first aid contacts
- familiarisation with fire arrangements
- having numbers for security staff available

1.10 Discussions on the risk assessments took place at Party Group meetings in early 2018 and following this Ward Members worked with the Political Assistants to complete a risk assessment checklist to identify risks and action areas. The risk assessments also had a personal safety guide for councillors covering:

- running a safe surgery;
- dealing with emotional constituents;
- safety out and about;
- home visits;
- malicious and nuisance telephone calls;
- mail and packages;
- car safety and parking;
- reporting incidents; and
- training.

1.11 Where the risk assessment identified issues, advice was given to Members to put in place mitigations to reduce risk. In addition, Members were provided with copies of the following:

- Staff Lone Working Policy 2015;
- information from Adult Social Care on reporting abuse; and

- information from the Barnet Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) on keeping children and young people in Barnet safe and supported. All Members were offered personal safety alarms at this time.
- details of how to report an incident.

1.12 The risk assessments which were completed identified some issues with specific venues. In these cases, mitigations were put in place, or Members stopping using venues completely and found better alternatives.

1.13 In October 2019 officers reissued the risk assessments and circulated updated advice to Members including:

- Barnet Corporate Health, Welfare and Safety Policy for Lone Working 2017;
- Guidance on lone working from the Health & Safety Executive and the Suzy Lamplugh Trust;
- Guidance on reporting incidents;
- Guidance on raising adult or child safeguarding concerns

Training and Development

1.14 In addition to the advice and support offered to Members relating to surgeries, officers have also organised training sessions covering the following:

- In November 2018 and February 2020, the Community Safety Team delivered sessions on Prevent covering: Prevent Duty; vulnerabilities; behaviours; Channel Panel; the role of Members; online resources; and guidance; and In November 2021 Personal Safety for Members covering: surgery safety; reading body language; scenarios where councillors may face challenging behaviour and risk; canvassing; risk management; tips for online safety; relevant legislation; technology to support personal safety; general advice and guidance.
- Officers are liaising with the police colleagues in the Barnet, Brent and Harrow Borough Command Unit to schedule Member training on 'Action Counters Terrorism (ACT)' in January 2022 to cover the following topics:
 - Introduction to Terrorism
 - Identifying Security Vulnerabilities
 - How to Identify and Respond to Suspicious Behavior
 - How to Identify and Deal with a Suspicious Item
 - What to do in the Event of a Bomb Threat
 - How to Respond to a Firearms or Weapons attack

Guidance

1.15 In addition to the guidance referred to above, officers will proactively identify advice and guidance and share with Members. For example, in November 2021 officers circulated personal safety guidance from the Local Government Association¹ for Members covering:

- Ward surgeries;

¹ [Personal safety | Local Government Association](#)

- Dealing with a variety of behaviours;
- Home visits;
- Potentially violent persons register;
- Lone working;
- Personal callers to councillor's private homes;
- Home security;
- Attendance at meetings;
- Demonstrations;
- Travelling safely;
- Reporting incidents;
- Training; and
- Terrorist-level threats.

1.16 The site provided links to other content on:

- Handling intimidation;
- Councillors and social media;
- Handling abuse on social media; and
- What does the law say?

Action Areas

- 1.17 Explore ways to improve liaison with the police on existing and emerging threats to personal safety.
- 1.18 Considering other lone working contexts for councillors and develop a range of advice, guidance and support to minimise risks including: attending public meetings regarding controversial topics; surveys, petitions or canvassing in public areas; online (emails and social media); home visits; site visits; mayoral or civic events; site visits; and other contexts where Members may be recognised within the community.
- 1.19 Creating a single point of contact in the Council to liaise with if Members are being harassed by a member of the public (to assist with police liaison).
- 1.20 Considering whether security is required at Members Surgeries.
- 1.21 Reviewing arrangements at other local authorities relating to Member Safety and applying best practice in Barnet.
- 1.22 Adding information relating to Member Safety the Members Intranet page being launched in the new year.
- 1.23 Highlighting to members that under the Localism Act sensitive interests may be exempted from publication in certain circumstances.

- 1.24 Review safety arrangements at Full Council, committee meetings, partnership boards, etc.
- 1.25 Explore with Political Groups how they support the personal safety of elected Members when they are acting as a Member of a Political Group and identify improvement areas such as:
 - Consideration of political parties to fund location technology such as Solo Protect
 - Consider the use of location Apps such as Life 360 to identify location whilst travelling to and from venues.

2. Reasons for recommendations

- 2.1 The Chairman of the Constitution & General Purposes Committee has requested that officers undertake a review of Member safety following the murder of Sir David Amess.

3. Alternative options considered and not recommended

- 3.1 The Council could decide not to review arrangements for Member safety. This is not recommended as the Council has a duty of care to elected Members when acting in their roles as a Member of the Council and as a Ward Councillor.

4. Post decision implementation

- 4.1 Subject to any additional areas identified by the Committee, officers will review the action areas identified and take additional steps to improve Member safety arrangements where possible.

5. Implications of decision

5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance

- 5.1.1 Improving arrangements in relation to Member safety helps support delivery of the Barnet Plan 2021 – 2025 priority of Clean, Safe and Well-Run

5.2 Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)

- 5.2.1 Any Member training needs can be supported from the Member Development Budget.
- 5.2.2 Any additional resource implications identified following a review of the action areas will be reported to a future meeting of the committee.

5.3 Legal and Constitutional References

- 5.3.1 Council Constitution, Article 7, Committees, Forums and Working Groups – the terms of reference of the Constitution & General Purposes Committee includes: Member Development; and Health and Safety Strategy and Performance.

5.3.2 Under the Localism Act there is an obligation for members to publicly declare Interests for reasons of transparency in decision making. Section 32 of the Act deals with sensitive interests where the disclosure of such an interest on the register or at a meeting may lead to violence or intimidation. Councillors should contact the Monitoring Officer if they consider that this section applies to them. There may be circumstances where if it is an address the whole or part of the address does not appear on the public register

32 Sensitive interests

(1) Subsections (2) and (3) apply where—

(a) a member or co-opted member of a relevant authority has an interest (whether or not a disclosable pecuniary interest), and

(b) the nature of the interest is such that the member or co-opted member, and the authority's monitoring officer, consider that disclosure of the details of the interest could lead to the member or co-opted member, or a person connected with the member or co-opted member, being subject to violence or intimidation.

(2) If the interest is entered in the authority's register, copies of the register that are made available for inspection, and any published version of the register, must not include details of the interest (but may state that the member or co-opted member has an interest the details of which are withheld under this subsection).

(3) If section 31(2) applies in relation to the interest, that provision is to be read as requiring the member or co-opted member to disclose not the interest but merely the fact that the member or co-opted member has a disclosable pecuniary interest in the matter concerned.

Section 31(2) deals with interests declared at meetings.

5.4 **Insight**

5.4.1 N/A

5.5 **Social Value**

5.5.1 N/A

5.6 **Risk Management**

5.6.1 Via the actions completed to date and identified action areas, the Council are seeking to reduce risks to Members in a variety of contexts where risks to their personal safety may exist.

5.7 **Equalities and Diversity**

5.7.1 N/A

5.8 **Corporate Parenting**

5.8.1 N/A

5.9 Consultation and Engagement

5.9.1 N/A

5.10 Environmental Impact

5.10.1 N/A

6. Background papers

6.1 None