



Constitution & General Purposes Committee

6 October 2022

Title	Member Safety Review
Report of	Clair Green, Executive Director of Assurance
Wards	All
Status	Public
Urgent	No
Key	No
Enclosures	Appendix A – Members Safety Intranet Page Content Appendix B – Ward Surgery Risk Assessment Checklist
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Summary

This report provides an update on actions taken by officers further to a review of Member Safety which was considered by the Committee in January 2022. The review considered the safety of councillors in council-owned premises (Hendon Town Hall, libraries, etc.) and the safety of councillors in pursuit of their public duties in particular Members' surgeries. A follow up under each agreed action is detailed in the report.

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, including a review of Appendix A (Members' Safety Intranet Page)

1. Why this report is needed

- 1.1 The former Chair of the Committee requested that officers undertake a review of Member safety following the killing of Sir David Ames in October 2021. The review considered the safety of councillors 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 progress on the actions agreed at the meeting of the Committee in January 2022.

Action Areas

- 1.2 **Action:** *Explore ways to improve liaison with the police on existing and emerging threats to personal safety.*

The council is keen to hear of any concerns raised by Members in relation to their safety. Any Member in immediate danger should always dial 999 and should always report criminal matters to the police. Secondly the council should be contacted via the incident report form (link on the Members' Safety intranet page).

The Community Safety Team is prepared, where necessary, to liaise with the police and other partner agencies on behalf of Members in relation to their safety.

Informing the council and the Governance Service of any concerns or incidents will help to inform future actions the Council could take to reduce risks to Members. The Head of Governance should be contacted to discuss general Member safety issues.

The Community Safety Team shares daily updates with the neighbourhood police and any safety concerns will be shared with relevant Members (e.g. Leader, Chair of the Community Leadership & Libraries Committee and/or Ward Members). The Members Safety intranet page emphasises that Members should contact the police if they consider themselves to be in danger, or feel harassed or abused

- 1.3 **Action:** *Consider 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.*

- 1.3.1 All Members were offered live online personal safety training to cover the most common risk scenarios faced by all Ward Councillors as part of their induction programme in May 2022. This was led by external trainer David McGrath, Link Support Services and included all the areas requested under this action point.

In June 2022 the Executive Director of Assurance, Assistant Director Corporate Anti-Fraud and Community Safety, Community Safety Manager and the Strategic Lead for Safer Communities provided training at Hendon Town Hall for all Members, which covered Anti-Social Behaviour, Prevent (counter-terrorism), Channel Duty (Protecting vulnerable people from being drawn into terrorism), Child Sexual Exploitation and Barnet Violence against Women and Girls Strategy.

In November 2022 the Metropolitan Police local Security Operations Team provided online live training for all Members which covered an introduction to terrorism, identifying security vulnerabilities, how to identify and respond to suspicious behaviour,

dealing with suspicious items, what to do in the event of a bomb threat and how to respond to a firearms or weapons attack.

The Member Development Programme includes planned training on social media which will take place on 3rd November 2022 (hybrid) and 22nd November 2022 (online) with external provider Bethan Evans. The training will cover: keeping safe; dealing with situations when Members receive social media attention; being alert to danger zones and awareness of good practice in relation to social media.

All Barnet Member Development training courses are repeated periodically, and additional sessions can be provided on request. Further information and where available, a recording of training sessions can be forwarded to Members who are unable to attend.

- 1.3.2 Further to discussions at the Committee in January 2022 the Members' intranet page has been updated with comprehensive advice including threats to physical safety, home safety, harassment, abuse and online safety. (Appendix A). Signposting is provided with further information on specific topics, with a focus on the lone working aspect of Members' role and how to mitigate the heightened risks of lone working.

All council-owned premises have security/evacuation arrangements and staff in attendance who are trained in the necessary procedures. In the case of anticipated controversy or larger than usual public attendance at committees or other meetings, officers will be aware of this in advance and will make arrangements for additional security and other staff to be present as necessary.

- 1.4 **Action:** *Create 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).*

The Members' Safety intranet page highlights to Members that they do not have to accept any situation that makes them uncomfortable or feel physically or psychologically unsafe in order to carry out their role, and that each person will have their personal resilience threshold for behaviours which should not be tolerated. Members are encouraged to report any concerns to the police and the council via the reporting mechanism detailed above, and to keep a record of incidents and share these with officers. Measures to protect Members can be put in place by the police and the Governance Service where this is required. Moreover any reports of any type of threat or abuse are welcomed by officers, as they provide helpful feedback on current issues, and support the ongoing protection and support of Members. The intranet page will be reviewed regularly by the Governance Service to incorporate new guidelines or emerging threats.

Members are urged to make contact with the police for emergency/criminal matters, or Head of Governance for general personal safety issues as appropriate and set out in 1.2.

- 1.5 **Action:** *Consider whether security is required at Members' Surgeries.*

During the pandemic, face-to-face surgeries were suspended. Since early 2022, there has been a gradual return by Members to face-to-face Ward Surgeries with many more Members re-starting surgeries after the May 2022 Local Election. Currently 21 Members hold Ward Surgeries, which are detailed on the Barnet website. Of these, four hold

online-only surgeries, four have face-to-face and online surgeries (on separate days), and the remainder hold all their Surgeries face-to-face. One is by appointment only.

The Governance Service continues to work with Members who are in the process of sourcing appropriate venues or who require help with setting up online surgeries. A risk assessment checklist (Appendix B) is circulated to Members who decide to return to face-to-face surgeries and the checklist is routinely reviewed with the Barnet Health and Safety and Community Safety teams. Advice is provided regarding the reduction of risk and measures which could be put in place to protect Members. It is the individual councillor's responsibility to ensure that they have read and understood the risk assessment and that they follow any control measure(s) 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 Service and Health and Safety as and when this becomes apparent.

Of note, some Members have changed venue as a result of engaging with the risk assessment. The checklist has therefore been helpful not only in mitigating risk but can help to raise awareness on the wider aspects of personal safety for Members.

Current Surgeries in the community are all in risk-assessed venues, either council-owned or community centres, with procedures in place for emergency situations. Officers do not recommend that security is provided at Members' Surgeries but that risk assessments are carried out and control measures followed.

Where possible it is recommended that council premises are used to hold Ward Surgeries, some of which may have security staff or reception staff in the building at all times.

Members can choose to hold online, telephone or 'by appointment only' Surgeries if they prefer.

Another preventative approach that is recommended is the use of a 'dynamic' risk assessment – it is recommended that all Members preferably, but in particular new Members, buddy up when undertaking Ward Surgeries to reduce any potential risk and increase the potential for arising threats to be noticed. It also recommends that an appointment system is used so that Members do not meet people unknown to them when alone. More experienced Members may be more likely to spot a potential hazard/de-escalate a conflict situation for example.

Members are also advised to seek and discuss information from the Governance Service and the MASH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub- link below) team on localised risk, especially where elected Members are meeting members of the public or holding surgeries without security.

[Adults Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub \(MASH\) | Barnet Council](#)

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.

1.6 **Action:** *Reviewing arrangements at other local authorities relating to Member Safety and applying best practice in Barnet.*

A telephone benchmarking exercise has been carried out by the Governance Service and has shown that other local authorities provide a similar level of safety support as that provided by Barnet for its Members. This includes signposting to standard documents and advice from the Health and Safety Executive, the Local Government Association and corporate Health and Safety and Lone Working Policies, and reviewing the information provided on a regular basis.

Identifying risks in relation to Ward Surgeries via a checklist for non-Council venues is standard practice in local authorities.

It is not standard practice to deploy security staff unless a large number of people are known to be due to attend a meeting on a controversial topic for example, and in the event of an incident it is usual to follow emergency procedures and report incidents to the police.

1.7 **Action:** *Adding information relating to Member Safety to the Members' Intranet page being launched in the new year.*

See 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5 above. An intranet page has been launched and is continually updated. Appendix A (attached) is the current version of the page for the Committee to provide comments on.

1.8 **Action:** *Highlighting to Members that under the Localism Act 2011 sensitive interests may be exempted from publication in certain circumstances.*

This information has been added to the Members' Safety intranet page (please see 5.3.2).

1.9 **Action:** *Review safety arrangements at Full Council, committee meetings, partnership boards, etc.*

Please see 1.3 above. The Governance Service, Facilities and the Health and Safety team are satisfied with current arrangements. The Governance Service is in regular contact with Facilities and Health and Safety regarding issues relating to meetings and Barnet's procedures are similar to other local authorities.

1.10 **Action:** *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.

Political Groups provide some signposting on safety to their Members. Information on free personal safety apps is provided on the Members' Safety webpage. If specific security risks are identified this will be discussed with Health and Safety, Governance Service and Community Safety teams but currently there is no provision of apps for Members.

2. Reasons for recommendations

- 2.1 The Constitution & General Purposes Committee requested that officers take away actions further to a discussion on Member Safety at a meeting of the Committee in January 2022.
- 2.2 It is not suggested that further interventions are needed at this time, other than activities currently undertaken.

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 take additional steps where recommended. It is not anticipated that this is required at the current time though feedback on the current interventions is welcomed.

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 will 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 the Council is 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 The council will remain aware when supporting and training Members in personal safety that individual experiences and perceptions of safety may vary, and can be affected by one or more of the protected characteristics under the 2010 Equality Act which are as follows:

- a) Age
- b) Disability
- c) Gender reassignment
- d) Pregnancy and maternity
- e) Race
- f) Religion or belief
- g) Sex
- h) Sexual orientation
- i) Marriage and civil partnership

5.7.2 The 2010 Equality Act outlines the provisions of the Public Sector Equality Duty which requires Public Bodies to have due regard to the need to: eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010 advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups and foster good relations between people from different groups.

5.7.3 The broad purpose of this duty is to integrate considerations of equality into day-to-day business and keep them under review in decision making, the design of policies and the delivery of services.

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 [Committee Report \(moderngov.co.uk\)](https://www.moderngov.co.uk). Member Safety, Report to Constitution and General Purposes Committee, 6 January 2022.