

Lone Working Policy

Appendix E

Personal Safety: A Guide for WLDC. Members

The relationship between members and the communities they serve has always been at the heart of what being a West Lindsey District Council member is all about. Face to face contact, when members of the public can share problems and concerns, is vital to making that relationship work. In recognition of this vital role, we feel that it is essential that members are helped to carry out this role safely and effectively. This leaflet contains advice aimed at members but it should also be read and acted on by council officers.

Introduction

An important role for members is to keep in touch with their communities. This includes helping individuals with any problems they might have. Often this extends beyond just the delivery of council services. These contacts are usually rewarding and friendly. Members become experienced in calming down and treating with respect and sympathy angry and frustrated residents who often resort to their elected representative when they feel that they are getting nowhere in resolving their problems through other channels.

Circumstances will vary and members will take their own decisions about how to conduct their duties as members while remaining easily accessible to their residents.

The purpose of this guide is not to make members nervous but to set out what personal safety measures can be taken to prevent, and to deal with, those rare circumstances when they might find themselves in situations where they become anxious for their safety. In general terms, the guidance follows advice given to others who, by virtue of public duties or employment, meet many people that they do not know.

Ward Surgeries

The arrangements each member makes will vary accordingly to local circumstances. You will be fortunate to find premises for a surgery which meet every aspect of good practice and are also accessible to the community. These are suggestions about how to make a surgery safe and effective. Some apply wherever the surgery is held, while others are good practice to be followed if the opportunity arises. Most members will go through their entire service on the council without experiencing any serious problems, but a little time given to preparation and planning can reduce the already small risk further.

The basics:

- If possible do not hold surgeries alone in an otherwise empty building. Try to get someone to act as 'receptionist'. This not only makes you safer but makes it much easier to manage a busy surgery. If you are currently doing surgeries alone, arrange to discuss how this can be overcome with fellow

- members, council officers or members of the local party.
- If you cannot avoid doing surgeries on your own, make sure you remember a few simple guidelines. The layout of the room should suit you - you should sit nearest to the door with the residents seated on the other side of the table. Seating is best set out at an angle of 45 degrees (seating directly opposite can be confrontational).
- If there is no separate waiting room, try to make sure that the waiting people are as far as possible away from those that you are talking to.
- Make sure there are no heavy items in the room that could be used as weapons.

If you are at the stage of looking for suitable premises in which to hold a surgery, try to get a space with as many as possible of the following features:

- public premises (for example libraries) during opening hours or other premises where there are many other people about
- premises where the names of any visitors for members are recorded
- premises where there is a comfortable waiting area
- the surgery room:
 - is in view of the reception or public area
 - is connected to the reception by an alarm and there is a procedure for dealing with a call for assistance
 - has a vision panel in the door
 - is decorated in calming (pastel) colors
 - has a swift means of escape and any visitors are not able to lock the door from the inside

Dealing with Emotional Constituents

It is inevitable that some of the people you will meet will be angry or upset - if everything in the garden was rosy, they probably wouldn't be coming to see you. You need to be prepared to handle all types of emotion. For example, it is worth having some tissues on hand for the person that it is just too much for and who bursts into tears.

Members have to develop the quiet skill of being concerned about people's problems without being so involved that they become too emotional to be a help. Calmness in the face of whatever comes up will help you and the residents.

You may find that racist or other offensive remarks are made. If they are directed at you - do not respond - this will only make the situation worse. Instead bring the interview to an end as quickly as possible. If they are more general remarks, you should indicate that this is not acceptable and that you cannot continue the interview. Often this will elicit an apology. Otherwise ask the person to leave. However, you must use your own judgment and **if you are alone and in a vulnerable situation do not put yourself at risk** no matter how angry the remarks make you.

Comprehensive training is available to help those who have to deal with aggressive and difficult people. A wide range of advice is included in such training (for example

Dressing sensibly-not wearing anything around your neck, (scarves and so on) that a person could get hold of). If you feel you would benefit ask the council to provide you with suitable training?

Home Visits

Members do sometimes visit residents in their homes especially those who are elderly or disabled or where they simply want to see for themselves conditions that are the subject of complaints.

It is for you to decide whether a particular visit should be made, especially if the person to be visited is unknown to you. Most of you will trust your own instincts as to whether to meet someone alone. Sometimes you might prefer to be accompanied by a ward colleague or get an initial report from Council officers or invite the person to a more public place. It is always advisable for you to keep a record of your whereabouts. If necessary, you can let the person that you are visiting know there is such a record or that you are expected at another place by a certain time or make a call on your mobile phone during the visit.

Personal Callers

Most members try to maintain a balance between their personal and public lives and do not want to encourage any callers at their private homes. Good publicity by the council on how to contact members and details of ward surgeries reduces the chances of unwanted callers.

Malicious and nuisance telephone calls

As members you occasionally get the odd nuisance or abusive call. Although infrequently, you can become the target of a persistent, anonymous caller who may have a grudge against the council. These calls need to be dealt with in accordance with police advice:

- keep the caller talking
- note any clues the caller may provide as to sex, age, accent and so on
- listen for any clues as to the motive and intention of the caller
- write down the details immediately to assist police at a later stage
- listen for background noise which may provide valuable information (for example railway sounds, industrial noises, machinery, music, animals)
- inform the police

Mail

As with telephone calls, on rare occasions you can become the target of a malicious letter/ email. Any such correspondence should be given immediately to the police.

Car Safety and Parking

You need to take the same precautions as most car owners do:

- consider whether an area will be dark and isolated when you return to your car

- park, where possible, under street lighting
- lock car doors as soon as you get into the car
- take boxes/bags to the car when other people are around

Reporting Incidents

Any incidents of concern, even if fairly minor or 'nearly happened' should complete the electronic form on the Extranet report an accident/incident. This helps us to carry out the proper monitoring and decide if any action needs to be taken to prevent a similar incident reoccurring. You may also consider it advisable to warn your ward colleagues.

Training

We have responsibilities for the safety of members whilst on council business as we do for our officers.

As mentioned earlier training is available. Training may help members do their jobs with a minimum of personal risk. If you think you would benefit from this type of training please talk to member services and ask them to look at arranging training for members

Other Guidance Available

- General Preventative and Safety Guidance for Lone working staff (**Appendix A**)
- Loan Work Risk Assessment (**Appendix B**)
- Complex, Difficult and Dangerous Customer Procedure