

North Tyneside Council Report to Standards Committee Date: 1 September 2016

ITEM 6

Title: Members' Safety

Report from Service Area: Law and Governance

Report Authors: Vivienne Geary, Monitoring Officer (Tel: 643 5339)
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Wards affected: All

1.1 Purpose of Report:

To advise the Committee of the guidance, training and support available to Members in relation to their personal safety when undertaking ward business and surgeries.

1.2 Recommendation(s):

The Committee is requested to note the report.

1.3 Information

Death of Jo Cox MP

As the Committee will be aware, on 16 June 2016, Jo Cox, the Member of Parliament for Batley and Spen, was tragically murdered by a member of the public, shortly before she was due to hold a constituency surgery.

Following these events Parliament issued guidance to its Members in relation to personal safety when undertaking constituency business. In addition the Police issued, via the Authority, safety advice to all Councillors in a booklet, attached at Appendix 1, entitled Protect Yourself. This advice was also shared with Councillors across the country.

National advice from the Police indicated that they did not consider that there was any higher risk to Members of Parliament, local Councillors, or anyone in our communities following the murder of Jo Cox but that they understood people may have raised concerns. The Police advised that concerns should be raised with local neighbourhood officers or by dialling 101.

Safety of Members of North Tyneside Council

Councillors are in a similar position to MPs when they undertake ward business and surgeries. The Authority has therefore reviewed the guidance that it issues to Members. A leaflet, drafted with the assistance of the Authority's Health and Safety service, will be soon be issued to all Members detailing appropriate guidance for Members when they undertake ward business.

In addition Lone Working and Conflict Management training has been made available to all Members. The first training session was delivered on 27 July 2016 and further sessions are available throughout the year.

Members will be aware that intelligence information is often the key to understanding the extent of risk or even a potential attack. Members have therefore been requested to advise the Customer Liaison and Member Support Office of any incident, no matter how small or trivial, where their personal safety or the personal safety of member of the public was at risk when ward business and surgeries were being undertaken. The collation of such intelligence information will enable officers to establish patterns of behaviour and where necessary to advise Members accordingly and if necessary the Police.

Linked to intelligence gathering Members are also being advised by the Customer Liaison and Member Support Office to check with their office that risk assessments of premises where they undertake surgeries and meet with the public have been completed. Information and guidance can be provided to Members where premises do not have a risk assessment. The purpose of the risk assessment is to allow a systematic examination of a site or premises where a surgery is undertaken to identify the significant or potential hazards that could cause harm or ill health and allow measures to be identified to mitigate those hazards.

The Code of Conduct for Members and Sensitive Interests

The Localism Act 2011 and the Authority's Code of Conduct require Members to declare their Registerable Interests. The Act also requires the Authority to publish on its website all Members' Registers of Interest. One of the requirements placed on Members by the Code of Conduct is to declare property and land in which a Member has a beneficial interest in the Authority's area. This requirement will usually cover the Member's home address as well as any other property and land in which that the Member may have a legal interest.

Some Members may have material concerns regarding the publication of their home address and the 2011 Act provides that where a Member is concerned that disclosure of the detail of an interest either at a meeting or on the Register of Members' Interests would lead to the Member or a person connected with him/her being subject to violence or intimidation, s/he may request the Monitoring Officer to agree that the interest is a "sensitive interest".

If the Monitoring Officer agrees, based on evidence submitted by the Member, that there is a real prospect of the Members being subject to violence or intimidation the Member is then allowed to disclose the existence of an interest only, rather than the detail of it (i.e. the address) at a meeting, and the Monitoring Officer can exclude the detail of the interest, such as the home address, from the published version of the Register.

Members who consider that their circumstances are such that they have sensitive interests must contact the Monitoring Officer and provide evidence in support of the assertion. Whether a sensitive interest continues to exist is kept under periodic review.

1.4 Appendices

Appendix 1 - Protect Yourself Booklet

1.5 Contact officers:

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1.6 Background information:

None.