

# Maidstone Borough Council

## Member Safety Guidance



Version Control	V1. Draft (Sept. 2022)
-----------------	------------------------

## Contents Page

Introduction

SHIELD Principles

Handling Abuse and Intimidation

Reporting Incidents

- In-Person
  - During and/or After Meetings
  - Ward Surgeries
  - Home and/or Site Visits
  - Parking
- Via Phone
- Online
  - Recording and Reporting Inappropriate Behaviour

Managing Challenging Situations

Contact Information

Useful Links

Incident Form and Template

Example Reporting Process

DRAFT

## **Introduction**

This guidance is intended to provide preliminary advice to Members on how to ensure their safety whilst acting in their capacity as an elected representative. This includes taking preventative and responsive measures, as appropriate, however many Members are likely already making these considerations.

There is no expectation or requirement for any Member to comply with and/or demonstrate their consideration of this guidance. It is intended to be a helpful resource for both Members and Staff that may have to assist in managing inappropriate behaviour directed towards Members.

The information included within the guidance is not an exhaustive list and is unable to address every type of scenario. Members should also consider whether any interactions and/or incidents should be escalated to external bodies, such as Kent Police, on a case-by-case basis.

## **SHIELD Principles**

The SHIELD principles have been created by the Local Government Association (LGA) and provide a basic framework for Members to reduce risks and handle incidents arising from engaging with the public.<sup>1</sup>



The infographic is a purple rectangular graphic with a yellow border on the right side. At the top left, there is a yellow speech bubble containing the text 'LGA SHIELD PRINCIPLES'. Below this, on the left side, is a paragraph of text. On the right side, there are six rows, each with a yellow circular icon and a corresponding principle name and description. At the bottom left, there is a yellow shield icon with the text 'LGA SHIELD PRINCIPLES' below it.

**LGA SHIELD PRINCIPLES**

To support councillors to handle abuse and intimidation, the LGA has developed the following shield principles to reduce risks and handle incidents if they occur:

- SAFEGUARD**  
Protect yourself online and in person by proactively setting out a zero-tolerance policy of abuse, threats or intimidation. Seek advice on online and in-person safety.
- HELP**  
Ensure you are safe before you take further action and get help if needed. If the threat is immediate, call 999.
- INFORM**  
If it's safe to do so, say that you consider the communication or action to be intimidating, threatening or abusive and challenge poor behaviour.
- EVIDENCE**  
Gather evidence of abuse, intimidatory or threatening communications; take photos, recordings or screenshots, keep letters, emails and details of witnesses.
- LET PEOPLE KNOW**  
Report the incident to the appropriate person, such as council or political officers, social media companies, and the police if necessary.
- DECIDE**  
Determine whether you want to continue interacting with the person. If not, use social media function to end engagement and consider options to inhibit them from approaching you in person.

LGA SHIELD PRINCIPLES

<sup>1</sup> Local Government Association, 'General advice on handling abuse and intimidation'. [General advice on handling abuse and intimidation | Local Government Association](#)

Members should consider these principles as standard practice when conducting Council business, and many often do without actively realising it. Links to further information produced by the LGA are provided at the end of this guidance.

## **Handling Abuse and Intimidation**

The LGA defines public intimidation as:

*'Words and/or behaviour intended or likely to block, influence or deter participation in public debate, or causing alarm or distress which could lead to an individual wanting to withdraw from public life' (Local Government Association, Definition of harassment, abuse and intimidation (2022)).<sup>2</sup>*

Guidance on how to handle this in various settings (in-person, via phone and online) is provided below.

## **Reporting Incidents**

Members are not obliged to report any and/or all incidents of inappropriate behaviour that they experience.

If you would like to report an incident, please contact the Democratic Services Team (the Team) and/or the Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance. A record will be kept by the Team, with any actions taken dependent on the severity of the incident. This is relevant for all types of incidents.

A report incident form and example process of how reported incidents will be managed has been included as an appendix to this guidance. The form does not have to be completed to report an incident, but it can help to identify the types of information that could be included in reporting an issue.

## **In-person**

### **Council Meetings**

As elected representatives, Members are often faced with making decisions that may be unpopular.

#### **Ahead of the Meeting:**

- If you predict that there may be inappropriate behaviour at a meeting, which may be directed at you or another Member personally, please tell the Team of your concerns in advance so that you can be seated in a suitable area.

---

<sup>2</sup> Relevant Legislation – The Protection from Harassment Act 1997: [Protection from Harassment Act 1997 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)

- Any existing and/or serious concerns relating to a Member's safety should be raised with the appropriate organisations and Council teams (including Democratic Services) to put in place suitable mitigating actions.

#### Leaving the Meeting:

- Members should consider leaving with their colleagues and/or waiting for an Officer to exit with, particularly if there has been behaviour during the meeting to suggest that exiting may be difficult.

#### Ward Surgeries

Members may run ward surgeries for their Constituents. Please consider the following arrangements for your surgery's location:

- Can the surgery be held in a venue occupied by others also?
- Is there assistance available nearby?
- Is the layout safe? For example, can you sit nearest the door and either opposite to or at an angle from your constituents (as opposed to directly next to)?
- Does the room have a lock – if so, reconsider whether you can have this removed.
- Is the room clear of objects that could be used to cause injury?
- Can you let someone know what time you expect to start and finish your surgery? Provide them with your contact details.
- Is there a sign-in/out sheet available for visitors to use?

#### Home/Site Visits

Members may undertake visits to Constituent's personal homes and/or remote locations. In doing so, reasonable considerations include:

- Can you park your vehicle nearby and in an easily accessible place?
- If this is ward related, can a colleague attend with you?
- Have you provided your contact details, and estimated arrival and departure time to a colleague, so that they can check-in if needed?
- Can you share your location with a friend; For example, on WhatsApp you can share your location for a specified amount of time.
- Can you arrange the visit to avoid early morning and/or late evening time periods?
- Can you arrange to meet in public?

#### Parking

Members should be aware of their surroundings when parking their vehicle. Reasonable considerations include:

- Is there suitable lighting? Is the lighting likely to still be operational when you return to your car?
- Is the parking in close proximity to the meeting and/or visit?
- Are you able to park in a space that is easily accessible?
- Are you able to park near and/or car-share with any other Members?
- Are you able to walk back to your vehicle with any other Members and/or Officers?

- Can you share your location with a friend? For example, WhatsApp allows you to share your location with others specified amount of time.

## **Phone**

Harassment and abuse can take place via text, calls (including nuisance calls) and email. If you are contacted by an anonymous and/or nuisance caller, record as much detail as you can from the phone call to assist in reporting the issue, such as:

- Background noise that may identify where and who the person is
- Identity Clues, such as sex, age, accent, etc.

If you continue to experience these calls, please raise this with the Team and your personal contact information can be removed from the website if required.

A preventative measure could be to have a secondary phone number that is only used (and displayed on the Council's website) for Council-related Business.

## **Online**

Social Media is an important tool in being able to reach out to and communicate with the local community. Unfortunately, inappropriate behaviour directed towards Local Members including abuse, intimidation and harassment is not uncommon. This can be particularly difficult to manage where it occurs anonymously.

### Recording and reporting inappropriate behaviour:

Any abuse you experience in your capacity as a Member of the Council should be recorded (screenshot), and it is your choice whether to inform an individual that you will do this. In many cases, this is enough of a deterrent.<sup>3</sup>

You should then report the behaviour to the social media platform, and links have been included below on how to do this.

To record the interaction, report it to the Council through the Director of Insight, Strategy and Governance and/or the Team. A (Council) record will then be kept, and the appropriate teams informed depending on the incident's severity. You can also choose to report it to the Police.

### To report inappropriate behaviour:

Twitter: [How to report abusive behavior on Twitter | Twitter Help](#)

Facebook: [How do I report inappropriate or abusive things on Facebook | Facebook Help Centre](#)

Instagram: [How do I report a post or profile on Instagram? | Instagram Help Center](#)

---

<sup>3</sup> Local Government Association and Welsh Local Government Association, 'Councillors' guide to handling intimidation: Practical steps that you and your council can undertake to protect yourself as a person in a public position', p. 3: [Councillors' guide to handling intimidation \(mcusercontent.com\)](http://mcusercontent.com)

## **Managing challenging situations**

A list of potential actions that Members can take in managing challenging situations have been included below. These are not instructions, and Members should always use their judgement depending on the situation at the time.

- Members are provided with a contact list of organisations that provide help and support locally, including on the Council's website (shown below). Do not be afraid to signpost individuals to alternative service providers that may be able to help.
- If you are conversing with an individual and they make inappropriate and/or offensive remarks directed towards you personally, close the communication as soon as possible. Be wary of responding to and refuting the comments, as this may make the situation worse.
- If you are conversing with an individual and they make inappropriate and/or offensive remarks generally, state that this is unacceptable. An apology may be forthcoming, in which case you may be able to resume the communications and produce a positive outcome.<sup>4</sup>
- If the above two examples occur over a social media platform or via phone, screenshot and/or record any details that could identify this person in reporting the incident. You may wish to state that inappropriate behaviour will be reported.
- See the links within this guidance concerning reporting and/or blocking social media accounts.
- If you feel uncomfortable for any other reason, assess whether you can easily remove yourself from the situation and/or rearrange the scheduled interaction to another time/venue where you will feel more comfortable.

If any interaction has made you feel uncomfortable in any way, please record as much of the interaction as possible. This will help in reporting the incident and creating a log of all incidents, especially given that the Council maintains a Cautionary Contacts Database.

## **Contact Information**

Members should consider how much, and what type of information is shared online.

If a Member is subject to abuse and wishes to remove any of their contact details from the website, please contact Democratic Services. Democratic Services will refer the matter to the appropriate team if required.

## **Useful Links**

There is a significant amount of publicly available information to assist elected representatives in managing their safety. Several links are included in the table below. It is always worth checking whether your Political Party has issued its own safety guidance.

---

<sup>4</sup> Lincoln City Council, 'Personal Safety: A Guide for Councillors', pp.2-3: [PERSONAL SAFETY \(lincoln.gov.uk\)](https://www.lincoln.gov.uk/personal-safety)

<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Link</b>
Maidstone Borough Council	Community Support Page – Maidstone Borough Council Website.  <a href="#">Community Support   Maidstone Borough Council</a>
Local Government Association	General Advice on Handling Abuse and Intimidation.  <a href="#">General advice on handling abuse and intimidation   Local Government Association</a>  The page reached with the above link also links to a variety of pages addressing Member Safety and Wellbeing.
Local Government Association	Councillor E-Learning  <a href="#">Councillor e-learning   Local Government Association</a>
Local Government Information Unit	Personal Safety for Councillors  <a href="#">Personal-safety-for-councillors-March-2022.pdf (lgiu.org)</a>
Gloucestershire County Council	Publicly Available Safety Training Video: <a href="#">REC.VC Cloud Recording &amp; Streaming</a>

If any Member wishes to undertake further training, please pass the details of the training session to the Team, where consideration will be given to making this available via the Member Training Budget.

#### Incident Form Template

An incident form is attached at the end of this guidance. This form does not have to be completed for a Member to report an incident, but it does provide an outline of the matters that should be included.

If you are immediately concerned or feel that the incident is serious, please contact Kent Police.

If you need another copy of this form, please contact Democratic Services.

Incident Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date Form Completed: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like your Group Leader to be informed? If yes, state your Political Party.

\_\_\_\_\_

Role (tick as applicable):

Affected Person       Witness

Incident Type (tick as applicable):

Online       In-Person       Via Phone

Date of Incident: \_\_\_\_\_

Where did the incident take place? If an outside setting/venue, please provide a description of the local surroundings:

Were you undertaking Council Business?

Describe the incident in detail, and the suspected cause (if known, e.g., an unpopular decision):

What was the effect on you? If you are a Witness, you can also state the effect you feel this has had on the affected person:

Has the incident been reported to any other organisations? If yes, please state which organisations in the event that the Council needs to co-ordinate with these organisations.

## Example Reporting Process

1. The Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance/the Team is informed of an incident and/or concern relating to a Member's safety.

(See 1a or 1b dependent)

- a. If a form has been submitted, the Team will read the contents and assess whether this needs to be passed across to another team within the Council. This may involve discussions with the Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance and/or the Council's Safeguarding representatives.
- b. If a form has **not** been submitted, but concerns have been expressed by a/other Members, the relevant Member will be contacted by the Team and a record made of the interaction. If a Member needs assistance in filling out the above form/making a record of the incident, the Team will provide this help.

2. Depending on the concern's and/or incident's severity, either:

(See 2a or 2b dependent)

- a. A record will be kept and no action taken; OR
- b. The matter will be passed over to the relevant Officers (including Senior if required) and/or Teams.

In either scenario, the relevant Member will be informed of the action taken.

3. The outcome will be reported to the Team as required in case we are required to perform certain actions (e.g., such as removing contact details from the website or altering seating arrangements at public meetings).