

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE

30 November 2021

Review of personal safety measures for County Councillors

Report of the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Democratic Services)

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an overview of the measures that are currently in place for County Councillors to keep them safe when attending meetings in the community and, in light of the recent death of a sitting MP, to consider what further actions could be taken.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Conservative MP Sir David Amess was killed on 15 October 2021 whilst conducting a constituency surgery at a church in Leigh-on-Sea. This fatal attack upon a sitting MP has prompted the Government to review the support that is place for MPs when engaged in work at their constituency offices and in the community.
- 2.2 The Home Secretary, the Rt Hon Priti Patel MP, and the Speaker of the House of Commons, the Rt Hon Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP, are conducting the review into the safety of MPs. In doing so, the Home Secretary has maintained that any measures considered must be proportionate to the risk and that MPs should remain accessible to the members of the public that they serve.
- 2.3 The killing of a MP raises concerns about how the personal safety of all those people who are elected to public office is promoted, protected and managed and so it is timely to have a review of what is in place for County Councillors and to consider whether further action is needed.

3.0 COUNTY COUNCILLOR ROLE AND EXPERIENCE

- 3.1 At present, there are 72 County Councillors for North Yorkshire. The role of County Councillor demands active community engagement and involvement. This often means meeting in person with individuals or groups on a formal or informal basis in a range of different settings. Meetings will often be held in the evening and can be in remote and isolated rural areas where a mobile phone signal may be unreliable.
- 3.2 County Councillors tend not to run surgeries in the communities that they serve. When looking at the circumstances of the killing of Sir David Amess MP and the murder of Jo Cox MP, five years previously, both were at constituency surgeries.
- 3.3 At present, there is no formal, personal safety training offered to County Councillors. Where concerns are raised about personal safety, these are dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Typically, this involves a discussion with the Police, advice on managing safety and in some cases arrangements for a heightened Police response.

- 3.4 Whilst there has not been a serious incident in which a County Councillor has been physically assaulted by a member of the public, a small number of County Councillors have, over time, raised some concerns about threats and abuse targeted against them. This has led some to request that their phone number and address be removed from the County Council website and also follow up discussions with the local Police.
- 3.5 Following the murder of Jo Cox MP in 2016, the County Council circulated Local Government Association guidance to all county councillors. The current version of that guidance can be found here - [Councillors' guide to handling intimidation | Local Government Association](#)

4.0 PROMOTING THE PERSONAL SAFETY OF COUNCILLORS

- 4.1 A number of guides, briefings and documents were circulated to all County Councillors in October, following the death of the Conservative MP Sir David Amess:
- The Local Government Association guidance for Councillors on handling intimidation was re-circulated
 - A Cabinet Office briefing on security practices for members of local authorities, with a particular focus upon elections - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/security-guidance-for-may-2021-elections>
 - The Local Government Association Guide to Cyber Security for councillors - [11.106 Cyber Security councillor's guide_v04_WEB_0.pdf \(local.gov.uk\)](#)
- 4.2 The Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Democratic Services) and Monitoring Officer, Barry Khan, has confirmed that he will continue to liaise with the Police, if any County Councillors have any specific concerns about their personal safety.
- 4.3 As part of a broader approach to promoting the safety of County Councillors, the following could also be considered:
- Review the arrangements County Councillors have in place for managing their personal safety when attending meetings and meeting with members of the public
 - Enable County Councillors to contact designated officers to provide information about potentially violent persons prior to undertaking a home visit
 - Promote the reporting of incidences to better understand the scale of the issue and what further actions could be taken to reduce the associated risks
 - Hold a regular session on personal safety at Member Seminars, based upon the LGA Guide on handling intimidation.
- 4.4 In addition to the actions listed above, there is a Council fund that is ring-fenced for County Councillor security. Applications to the fund are considered confidentially on a case-by-case basis by the Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Democratic Services), taking into account the concerns raised by an individual councillor as they perceive them and what the most suitable course of action may be. No investigation will be undertaken as to whether there is any evidential support for the councillor's concerns and no assumptions are to be implied from the granting of any applications: it is purely a process to help allay councillor concerns as they perceive them to be. Where County Councillors have concerns, they could be encouraged to apply for support from this fund. The fund currently amounts to £15,000.

4.5 The Independent Remuneration Panel has been consulted on the use of the ring-fenced fund for County Councillor safety and given their support for the use of such a scheme to promote the safety of members.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 The Council has a duty to do what is reasonable to promote and protect the safety of County Councillors when engaging in their duties. There is always a risk that someone who has been elected to public office may be subjected to verbal, physical or on-line abuse. A proportionate and scaled approach to managing this risk would involve continued awareness raising through training and briefings, liaison with the Police where specific concerns have been raised, and access to dedicated funding to enable additional security measures to be put in place.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The financial implications are outlined in the body of this report.

7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no significant legal implications arising from this report.

8.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no significant climate change implications arising from this report.

9.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 The fatal attack upon Conservative MP Sir David Amess on 15 October 2021, whilst conducting a surgery in his constituency, has raised concerns about the safety of people elected to public office. It is timely, therefore, to consider what additional actions could be taken by the Council to promote the safety of its County Councillors.

10.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 That the Executive take a proportionate and scaled approach to managing the risk of verbal, physical and on-line abuse of County Councillors through the following:

- a) Continued awareness raising through training and briefings
- b) A review of the arrangements County Councillors have in place for managing their personal safety when attending meetings and meeting with members of the public
- c) Enabling County Councillors to contact designated officers to provide information about potentially violent persons prior to undertaking a home visit
- d) Promotion of the reporting of incidences to better understand the scale of the issue and what further actions could be taken to reduce the associated risks
- e) Liaison with the Police where specific concerns have been raised
- f) Access to dedicated funding to enable additional security measures to be put in place.

BARRY KHAN

Assistant Chief Executive (Legal and Democratic Services) and Monitoring Officer
County Hall, NORTHALLERTON

19 November 2021