



Date of meeting:	15 June 2023
Subject	Support for Councillors and Councillor Safety
Recommendation	The Democracy Services Committee is asked to accept the report for information.
Contact Officer:	Vera Jones, Democracy and Language Services Manager Catrin Love, Assistant Head of Corporate Support Cara Williams, Members' Development Officer

What is the background and relevant considerations?

1. A report was presented on Support for Councillors and Councillor Safety to a meeting of this Committee on 16 March 2023. There were considerable discussions regarding Councillors' concerns during the meeting.
2. The Head of Democracy Services reported in his annual report that the safety of Councillors is one of the main priorities for 2023-24. Two principal themes have been highlighted.
 - There are increasing pressures on Councillors and, therefore, the need to ensure **support and health and well-being support** for you.
 - In addition, issues with regards to **Councillor safety** have become apparent in light of national incidents, incidents within the Council and to individual Councillors.
3. The purpose of the report is to update you on the work which has been undertaken over the last few months in this field.

Communication

4. During the previous meeting of this committee, and in recent conversations with some Councillors, it has become apparent that every Councillor is not aware of the support already available to assist you to look after your health and well-being. This includes your physical and mental health.
5. Members Intranet. The 'Looking after yourself' page on the Members' Intranet refers to the support that is available.
6. Very useful information is available on the Members' intranet. We are also aware that not all Councillors are aware of the provision available here. A brief session will be held, following today's committee, to present information to all committee members. You are asked to spread the word amongst your fellow councillors about the available provision.

7. Members' Bulletin. As a result of the observations about the lack of awareness, it was decided to draw regular attention to the support that is available in this field. In the Members' Bulletin there is a specific piece every month that is shared with every councillor drawing attention to the different elements of support available every month. You have probably already noticed the following in the Members' bulletin.

Your Wellbeing



8. There is a monthly bulletin that focuses on a specific field in terms of your mental health or your safety.

March	The first bulletin drew your attention to the Conference held for Council Managers on the theme 'Mental Wellbeing - moving the conversation forward' sharing a recording of the event with you and drawing attention to the Safe Leadership training that is available.
April	Training was the focus in April as well, promoting the first aid mental health course.
May	The Medra Counselling Service was highlighted in the May bulletin. Full information is available on the Members' Intranet; however, all Councillors are reminded that the service is strictly confidential and you can contact Medra directly, and do not need to contact a Council officer to gain access. The bulletin also drew attention to the Mental Health Awareness and Suicide Training to be held on 21/06/2023.

Training

9. Several training sessions have been offered over the last few months specifically because of your requests as Councillors to get support in the mental health and safety field.

10. Mental Health. Several training sessions have been offered in this field.

- a. At the beginning of January, a two-day 'Mental Health First Aid' session was held, and very positive feedback was received.
- b. Another course was organised for June, but unfortunately not enough names were received to justify running the course. We will revisit the demand to hold this course again in the Autumn.
- c. In addition, because of a request from Councillors, Mental Health Awareness and Suicide Training will be offered on 21 June. The half-day course will be beneficial to assist you to identify the signs amongst the public in your wards, know how to respond and where to refer them for further assistance.

11. Security. As noted, the violence and harassment suffered by some Members increases their stress and the 'Safe Leadership' course has been adapted to help address this. It includes discussion and practical steps regarding personal safety to assist you to keep safe and to reduce personal stress. For those members who attended the course some time ago, but who have not received the new element on personal safety, a short session is available for the safety item only.

12. Below, is a summary of the incidents held and the numbers who attended the training.

Social Media - Managing your reputation on-line 15/12/22

5 Elected Members attended. This course was commissioned externally at the request of Members.

Social Media - how to create good content (18/01/23)

5 Elected Members attended. Again, this was a course organised at the request of Members.

Safe Leadership and Personal Safety 27/4/23

6 out of 30 attended - 4 left early, therefore only 2 received the new element on personal safety


Your Personal Safety 27/4/23 (a specific course for those who had already attended the Safe Leadership Course)

10 out of 23 attended

Helping people through the cost-of-living crisis - 26/4/23 and 10/5/23

16 attended - this was open to all interested. Another session is to follow soon.

13. The numbers who have been registering for the events have been quite low, however the feedback received from the sessions is extremely positive. A further message has been sent to every member who has not had an opportunity to attend the 'Safe leadership' course to strongly encourage them to attend. You are asked as committee members to encourage your fellow Councillors to take advantage of this very important provision that is available to you.



14. It was noted that the feedback from the sessions has been positive, and practical matters with regards to personal safety have been suggested by Councillors during the “Your Personal Safety” session held at the end of April. There were five elements raised, including

- a. Organised threat
- b. Conflict between neighbours
- c. Training to deal with difficult or dangerous people/situations - de-escalation
- ch. Discussion Forums
- d. Support Booklet

15. Work is being undertaken to move forward to respond to some of the matters raised. A general guide regarding “organised threat’ and ‘conflict between neighbours’ is being developed. Care must be taken in developing any guidance as all circumstances will be unique.

16. We are already trying to contact potential providers to organise training to deal with difficult or dangerous people or situations. An “Assertiveness” training session has been organised for the 20th of September – register with the Members' Development Officer (Cara Williams).

17. It was decided not to create a specific information booklet on safety matters as all the information is available on the Members' intranet. There is always a risk when printing hard copies of any information to have dated, and a failure to include the latest information. A request was also made to establish informal discussion forums and we will consider the request in the context of any formal arrangements to report on bullying etc.

Practical matters

18. It has already been reported that practical steps are in place to ensure the safety of Councillors, the safety of those attending the Chamber and staff during multi-location meetings. A report was given at the last meeting on the steps already taken, including risk assessments etc.

19. Since the last meeting further steps have been taken on physical safety measures in the Chamber. There are stronger arrangements to separate the public gallery from the Chamber floor, allowing access when required for individuals who need to attend the Chamber such as in the Planning Committees or to ask a question at the Full Council meeting.

20. We are also aware that as Councillors you are out and about in the community all the time. There are specific steps that could be considered to protect your safety and your family's safety, such as not publishing your home address on the website. Useful guidelines regarding safety considerations before holding surgeries in the community have also been included on the Members' Intranet and are discussed during the Safe Leadership training sessions which will assist you.



Mental Health.

21. One of the key services available to you is the Medra counselling service. The Service is confidential, and you can refer yourself to the Service - details on how to do so are on the Members' intranet site.

Sharing information further.

22. As representatives of all Members on the committee, you are asked to share this information with your fellow members to ensure that we all take responsibility for looking after ourselves and each other.

Recommendation

23. The Democracy Services Committee is asked to accept the report for information.