

STANDARDS AND ETHICS COMMITTEE

Date and Time:- Thursday 10 September 2026 at 2.00 p.m.

Venue:- Rotherham Town Hall, The Crofts, Moorgate Street, Rotherham. S60 2TH

Membership:- Councillors Clarke (Chair), Harper (Vice-Chair), Brent, T. Collingham, Cowen, Currie, Hall and McKiernan.

Parish Council Representatives:- Mr. A. Griffin and Mr. M. Senior.

Independent Members:- Mrs. A. Bingham, Mrs. K. Penney and Ms. R. Wright.

Independent Persons:- Mr. P. Beavers and Mr. D. Roper-Newman.

The items which will be discussed are described on the agenda below and there are reports attached which give more details.

Rotherham Council advocates openness and transparency as part of its democratic processes. Anyone wishing to record (film or audio) the public parts of the meeting should inform the Chair or Governance Advisor of their intentions prior to the meeting.

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence

To receive the apologies of any Member who is unable to attend today's meeting.

2. Declarations of Interest

To receive declarations of interest from Members in respect of items listed on the agenda.

3. Exclusion of Press and Public

To consider whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during consideration of any part of the agenda.

Under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for Agenda Items 7 and 8 (Consideration of Whistleblowing Policy and Complaints) on the grounds that their appendices involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting held on 11th June, 2026 (Pages 3 - 9)

To consider and approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on 11th June, 2026 as a true and correct record of the proceedings and signed by the Chair.

5. Strengthening the Standards Regime (Verbal Update)

To receive a verbal update on the Government's strengthening of the standards regime in England.

6. Report of the Debate not Hate Working Group (Pages 11 - 37)

To consider the work undertaken by the Standards and Ethics Committee Working Group in completing the Local Government Association Debate Not Hate self-assessment toolkit.

7. A Review of Concerns Raised Pursuant to the Whistleblowing Policy (Pages 39 - 46)

To give consideration to a report regarding concerns raised pursuant to the Whistleblowing Policy and the actions taken to address these matters.

8. Review of Complaints (Pages 47 - 54)

To give consideration to a report updating the Committee on the Complaints received against Members of the Council, and Town and Parish Councillors alleging a breach of the Code of Conduct.

9. Urgent Business

To determine any item which the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency.

**The next meeting of the Standards and Ethics Committee will
be held on Thursday 12 November 2026
commencing at 2.00 p.m.
in Rotherham Town Hall.**



**JOHN EDWARDS,
Chief Executive.**

STANDARDS AND ETHICS COMMITTEE
Thursday 11 June 2026

Present:- Councillor Clarke (in the Chair); Councillors T. Collingham, Harper and McKiernan, along with Parish Councillors Griffin and Senior and Mrs. A. Bingham (Independent Member).

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Currie, Mrs. K. Penny (Independent Member) and Mr. D. Roper-Newman (Independent Person).

Also in attendance were:-

Mr. P. Horsfield, Monitoring Officer
Mr. S. Fletcher, Deputy Monitoring Officer
Mr. P. Beavers, Independent Person

The Chair wished to place on record her thanks to Councillor Lelliott and other members who had been part of the 2025/26 Standards and Ethics Committee. In addition, she offered a warm welcome to the new Vice-Chair and new members for the 2026/27 municipal year.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved:- That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for (Minute Nos. 9 and 10 (Whistleblowing and Complaints) on the grounds that the appendices to those reports involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 12TH MARCH, 2026

Consideration was given to the minutes of the previous meeting held on 12th March, 2026.

Resolved:- That the minutes of the previous meeting held on 12th March, 2026 were approved as a true and correct record of the proceedings.

4. REVIEW OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT

Consideration was given to the report and appendix presented by the Deputy Monitoring Officer, requesting that the Standards and Ethics Committee reviews the Code of Conduct.

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The current Model Code of Conduct as provided by the LGA remained as it was drafted in 2020. The Code of Conduct was reviewed by the Committee last year in its current form, with no suggested amendments. The Monitoring Officer had reviewed the Code of Conduct and was, therefore, happy with its current content, however, the Committee may suggest any amendments they feel would be beneficial.

Furthermore, the Government recently carried out a consultation and provided a consultation response in relation to introducing measures to strengthen the standards and conduct regime in England, partly to ensure consistency of approach amongst Councils in addressing breaches of their member Code of Conduct. One of the items which the Government had stated it would take forward consulted on, was the introduction of a mandatory minimum Code of Conduct for local authorities in England, as opposed to the current optional model code.

The report and model Code set out the importance of regulated behaviour and it was imperative that any changes be monitored and the Committee updated accordingly.

Resolved:- That following a review of the Code of Conduct no amendments were suggested.

5. CIVILITY AND RESPECT PLEDGE

Consideration was given to an update by the Deputy Monitoring Officer on the Civility and Respect Pledge which was for local Councillors providing training and good governance. On this basis Parish and Town Councils were encouraged to make a commitment and sign up and support the Pledge.

The Committee recognised the benefits of local councils signing up and the Deputy Monitoring Officer had attended the Parish Network Group to encourage Parish and Town Councils to do so. Currently participation stood at approximately 50%, compared to the NALC national average of 20%.

The Civility and Respect Pledge was considered a key initiative for local councils, particularly in addressing issues of abuse and harassment.

The Committee had previously written to Parish Councils to encourage them to sign up and indicated that it wished to do so again.

The Chair requested that correlated data be brought forward, identifying which Councils had signed up to the Pledge which could also assist in analysing complaint levels. This was intended to determine whether any links could be drawn between complaint levels and Parish Councils that had not signed up and to use this evidence as a lever to encourage further uptake.

The Committee discussed when there had been any reported improvements in sign-up and were advised that the previous figure of 43% had increased to 50%. It was noted that some Parish Councils felt they already operated in a civil and respectful manner and, therefore, did not consider it necessary to sign up.

The Committee was encouraged to see progress and that the position compared favourably with the rest of the country where overall uptake remained low. There may be some valid reasons why some councils had not signed up.

The importance of ensuring that all Parish Councils operated correctly was emphasised with appropriate safeguards in place to deal with issues as they arose.

The Committee welcomed the suggestion that a further reminder be circulated on the benefits and to encourage Parish Councils to sign up to the Pledge.

Resolved:- (1) That the update on the Civility and Respect Pledge be received and noted.

(2) That the Deputy Monitoring Officer send a further reminder to Town and Parish Councils on the benefits to encourage them to sign up to the Pledge.

6. STRENGTHENING THE STANDARDS AND CONDUCT FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Consideration was given to the latest update on the Government's proposed Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework, the consultation for which the Committee had submitted comments. This had been with a view to the Government bringing forward primary legislation, including enhanced powers for local authorities including suspension and disqualification for members persistently found in breach of the Code of Conduct, as well as a mandatory Code of Conduct.

It was noted that the proposed legislation had not been included in the King's Speech. The LGA had expressed disappointment that this much needed reform was absent and the Government had responded that legislation would be brought forward when parliamentary time allowed. It was acknowledged that the Committee would be kept updated should there be any further developments, although it was recognised that the Government currently had other priorities.

The Chair asked how the Committee could maintain momentum with the LGA and whether it could continue to feed into the process.

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The Committee was advised that it could continue to lobby, including engaging with local MPs, and suggested that it would be beneficial to write to them to reinforce the Committee's position.

Resolved:- (1) That the update be received and the contents noted.

(2) That the LGA and local Members of Parliament continue to be lobbied for the bringing forward of the much needed reform for strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework.

7. DEBATE NOT HATE WORKING GROUP

Consideration was given to the update by the Deputy Monitoring Officer on the Working Group's latest meeting which looked in detail at the collaboration with the Police and how Councils reported and shared information.

The Committee was advised that the next meeting was to concentrate on the principle of creating a culture of safety and respect, which was recognised as a significant and wide-ranging topic. Other areas previously considered included Councillor wellbeing, online safety and health and safety with substantial work being undertaken across these themes.

It was stated that a report would be brought to the Committee in September, setting out the Working Group's findings and any recommendations arising.

The Chair highlighted the positive work emerging from the Working Group, particularly in relation to defining its remit for potential election candidates and considering how individuals could be better protected and supported. It was noted that the current landscape could be challenging and, if left unaddressed, might hinder democratic participation.

The Chair also emphasised the flexibility of the Working Group's arrangements, including the availability of hybrid meetings and the option to join via Microsoft Teams and encouraged other Committee Members to participate.

It was agreed that the Clerk would write to Committee Members to invite expressions of interest in joining the next meeting, scheduled for Tuesday, 21st July 2026 at 1.00 p.m.

Resolved:- (1) That the update be received and the contents noted.

(2) That an invitation be issued to other Committee Members to join the next meeting, scheduled for Tuesday, 21st July 2026 at 1.00 p.m.

8. REGISTER OF INTERESTS - PARISH COUNCILS

Consideration was given to the report presented by the Monitoring Officer which set out the findings of a review of Parish and Town Council members Registers of Interests.

The review considered Parish and Town Council websites and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC) records. A representative sample of Parish and Town Councils was examined at Councillor level to identify gaps in publication and accessibility.

The exercise found that Registers of Interests were held centrally by RMBC for all Councils reviewed and, therefore, compliance across Parishes and Town Councils as a whole was considered high. However, transparency varied significantly between Councils and in some cases, Councillors were listed without clear links to their Register of Interests.

Frequently occurring issues presented, such as Registers existing but not being consistently linked to individual Councillors and some Parish and Town Council websites relying entirely on RMBC for publication and often information appears fragmented or difficult to access.

Improvements which could be made include all Parish and Town Councils should provide direct links from each Councillor to their Register of Interests and a consistent Borough-wide format being implemented for publishing registers, although this may be dependent on the website provider for the Parish and Town Councils. If this was not possible Parish and Town Councils should be encouraged to ensure that their Registers were easy to locate, clearly labelled and accessible to the public.

As such the review concluded that Parish and Town Councillors' Registers of Interests were in place across the Borough. However, inconsistencies in publication and accessibility reduced transparency.

Furthermore, from 29th June 2026, Section 65 of the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 ('2026 Act') removed the requirement for a Local Government Member's home address to be published in Council registers of interest. The newly added Section 32A of the Localism Act 2011 required that Councils did not publish details of a Member's home address in public registers of interest unless an individual Member explicitly requested it.

To aid transparency, public registers of interest would still state that an interest existed, but that the address was withheld under the new Section 32A. The exact address details would still need to be declared, remain available internally to Councils and would continue to prevent conflicts of interest. Parish and Town Council Clerks have been informed about this change.

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It was considered appropriate to write to Clerks to request that they review the Registers of Interests and ensure they were published on their websites or appropriately linked to the RMBC website.

The Chair referred to the Committee's experience of working with Clerks and the potential barriers to publishing Registers of Interests, noting that it could be a substantial task, although managing and updating websites was generally manageable.

The Committee was advised that most Parish Councils were compliant and had the information available on their websites. However, it was noted that larger Parish Councils, with greater resources, were better placed to ensure appropriate arrangements were in place. Smaller Parish Councils sometimes found this more challenging, although it was emphasised that this should not detract from the importance of transparency as a key principle.

The Committee queried whether there was any correlation between Parish Councils that had not published Declarations of Interests and those that had not signed up to the Civility and Respect Pledge, suggesting there may be some overlap.

It was, therefore, noted that overall figures were available, but not broken down by individual Parish Councils. It was suggested that the Parish Liaison Officer be approached to obtain more detailed information and to explore whether any links could be identified between complaints, registers and pledge uptake, with a view to targeting further attention where needed.

It was suggested the Parish Liaison Officer may best be placed to provide some support where needed.

The Committee established that the majority of Parish Councils did have a website, although in some cases Registers of Interests were not published or there was no link to the Council's website, which may be due to training or resource issues or a lack of proficiency in website management.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and the contents noted.

(2) That the Parish Liaison Officer be approached to obtain more detailed information on Parish Councils and to explore whether any links could be identified between complaints, registers and pledge uptake, with a view to targeting further attention where needed.

(3) That the Parish Liaison Officer consider offering additional support to those Parish Councils that may be struggling to maintain registers and website management.

9. A REVIEW OF CONCERNS RAISED PURSUANT TO THE WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

Consideration was given to the report and appendix presented by the Deputy Monitoring Officer, which provided an overview of the Whistleblowing cases which have been received over the past year.

Particular reference was made to the appendix to the report which set out clearly the description of the concerns received and action taken.

Resolved:- That the Whistleblowing concerns raised over the previous year and the actions taken to address these matters be noted.

10. REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS

Consideration was given to the report presented by the Deputy Monitoring Officer, detailing the progress with the handling of complaints relating to breaches of the Council's Code of Conduct for Members and Town and Parish Councillors. The report listed the current cases of complaint and the action being taken in respect of each one.

Reference was made to each related case and recommended outcomes/actions identified were highlighted.

Resolved:- That the report be received and the contents noted.

11. URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair advised that there were no urgent items of business requiring the Committee's consideration.

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Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Standards and Ethics Committee – 10 September 2026

Report Title

Standards and Ethics Committee – Debate not Hate

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

N/A

Report Author(s)

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Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

This report presents the work undertaken by the Standards and Ethics Committee Working Group in completing the Local Government Association Debate Not Hate self-assessment toolkit. It provides an overview of and assurance as to the Council's arrangements across the five principles, identifies areas for improvement and recommends a proportionate programme of action.

Recommendations

1. That the Committee notes the work undertaken by the Working Group and endorses its findings regarding the comprehensiveness of the Council's existing arrangements.
2. That the Committee approve the recommendation of the Working Group that a Member Wellbeing Guide and portal are developed.
3. The Committee approves the recommendation of the Working Group that a Debate not Hate Communications and Engagement Plan are developed.
4. That the Committee approves the content of the Action Plan for further improvements at appendix 1.

5. That a report as to progress in respect of the Action Plan be brought back to the Committee within 12 months.

List of Appendices

Appendix 1 Action Plan
Appendix 2 Health and Safety Handbook

Background Papers

None

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

None

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Standards and Ethics Committee – Debate not Hate

1. Background

- 1.1 In September 2025 the Standards and Ethics Committee considered the objectives and resources associated with the Local Government Association's Debate Not Hate campaign. The Committee established a Working Group to undertake the self-assessment and report its findings and recommendations.
- 1.2 The Working Group agreed to consider each of the self-assessment toolkit's five principles in turn, supported by evidence from Democratic Services, Human Resources, Health and Safety, Neighbourhoods, Communications and relevant external partners. Meetings took place between November 2025 and July 2026.
- 1.3 The five principles considered were:
 - Creating supportive and informed spaces
 - Creating a risk-led approach
 - Creating an infrastructure
 - Creating connections
 - Creating a culture of safety and respect
- 1.4 The Working Group used the toolkit questions to structure discussion and evidence gathering. The conclusions in this report are judgements based on the evidence considered by the Group.

- 1.5 A cross-party Debate Not Hate motion was considered by Council in July 2026. The motion committed the Council to challenge the normalisation of abuse, sign up to the campaign, maintain clear reporting mechanisms, regularly review support, work with the police and take a zero-tolerance approach to abuse of councillors and officers.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 The Working Group found that substantial and comprehensive arrangements are already in place. These include induction and briefing, a Members' Portal, health and safety guidance, regular Member check-ins, wellbeing and Employee Assistance Programme access, an internal incident reporting route, risk assessment support, liaison with South Yorkshire Police and Operation Ford, and established officer responsibilities. The principal issue which the Working Group concluded is not the absence of systems, but the need to improve awareness, consistency of use, visibility, review and communication of those systems.
- 2.2 The key findings from the Working Group in respect of each of the Principles within the Self-Assessment Toolkit are set out below and the actions required to make the improvements referred to are set out in the Action Plan at Appendix 1:

Principle	Finding	Key evidence	Improvement focus
1. Supportive and informed spaces	Comprehensive	Members have access to health and safety guidance, surgery guidance, induction, six-monthly check-ins, incident reporting, wellbeing advisers, the Employee Assistance Programme and online learning.	Create a Member-specific wellbeing guide or hub; strengthen proactive promotion; refresh induction and regular communications; signpost suitable material to parish and town councils.
2. Risk-led approach	Comprehensive	Guidance, individual risk assessments for serious cases, safe surgery advice, police referral routes, safety checklists, alarms/apps and relevant intelligence checks are available.	Repeat personal safety and risk training during the term; strengthen social media safety guidance; encourage use of the central reporting route; periodically review themes and learning from incidents and check-ins.
3. Infrastructure	Comprehensive	A reporting process, designated officer contacts, escalation routes, supporting guidance and cross-service involvement are in place.	Reinforce and further publicise reporting pathways; refresh the handbook; review whether existing vexatious contact, social media, lone-working and

threat procedures can be adapted for Members.

4. Connections	Comprehensive, with an outcomes dependency on partners	Regular liaison and intelligence-sharing arrangements with South Yorkshire Police and Operation Ford are in place, supported by briefings and escalation routes.	Improve feedback and evaluation of partnership outcomes; reinforce consistent reporting; maintain local briefings; raise unresolved concerns about legal and enforcement thresholds through appropriate regional and national channels.
5. Culture of safety and respect	Partial, with a clear development opportunity	The Council has adopted a cross-party motion and the Code of Conduct addresses bullying, harassment and intimidation. Existing systems support individuals after incidents.	Translate the motion into a visible, sustained communications and engagement programme; publish clear expectations for respectful engagement; integrate messages into Council channels and Member communications; consider parish and candidate audiences.

2.3 Principle 1: Creating supportive and informed spaces

Evidence to the Working Group demonstrated that a broad support offer is already available. The Members' Portal contains a comprehensive Health and Safety Handbook (included at Appendix 2 as indicative of the material available), surgery guidance and links to LGA material on abuse and intimidation. The Group also heard that benchmarking undertaken through Democratic Services indicated that the Council's arrangements compared well with other authorities.

Member induction includes health and safety information and guidance on available support. Democratic Services undertakes six-monthly check-ins with Members, providing regular opportunities to discuss health, safety, wellbeing and other concerns. Incidents can be reported through the Members' Portal or raised directly with Democratic Services, with referral routes to South Yorkshire Police where necessary.

Members can access HR wellbeing advisers, the Employee Assistance Programme, counselling support and online learning containing wellbeing and stress-management material. The employee wellbeing guide could be adapted for Members, and relevant LGA material could be brought together with the Council's existing offer.

The Group identified a visibility issue. Health and safety information was substantial, but wellbeing-specific information was less prominent and Members may only discover support after a difficulty arises. Uptake of online learning may also be affected by limited awareness. Proactive and repeated promotion through induction, bulletins, briefings and the portal was therefore supported.

A separate Member Health and Wellbeing Champion was considered but was not recommended at this stage. Group Whips already have a pastoral function, while Democratic Services and HR provide established professional routes. The position could be reconsidered if future monitoring identifies an unmet need.

The finding of the Working Group in respect of the systems in place was that they were comprehensive (this is the terminology adopted in the Self-Assessment toolkit – Comprehensive, Partial and not addressed) The improvements referred to above and in the Action Plan should consolidate the offer into a Member wellbeing and support guide or hub, strengthen communications, make reporting and referral routes more visible and provide suitable signposting for parish and town councils.

2.4 Principle 2: Creating a risk-led approach

The Working Group heard that Members receive health and safety training during induction and have access to handbook and surgery guidance. The use of Council buildings for surgeries is encouraged because risk assessments, CCTV, staffing or footfall and other safety arrangements are more readily available. Guidance also addresses lone working, home visits and communicating whereabouts.

Where a serious or heightened concern is identified, Democratic Services can involve Health and Safety to undertake an individual risk assessment and identify proportionate measures. Evidence included checklists, personal safety tools, referrals to police and access through designated officers to information about potential hazards before visits or meetings.

The six-monthly check-in process provides a further mechanism for discussing safety and risk. The Working Group felt that a structured thematic review of the notes could help identify recurring concerns and inform guidance, communications or training, while preserving the confidentiality of individual discussions.

The online incident-reporting mechanism is not regularly used because Members commonly contact officers directly. Direct contact should remain available, but a complete central record would help to identify patterns, recurring perpetrators and changes in incident types. Members should therefore be reminded to ensure incidents are corporately recorded.

Online abuse and harassment emerged as the most persistent developing risk. Existing processes include a Member safety checklist, police escalation and platform reporting, but the Working Group heard that material often may not meet criminal, evidential or platform thresholds. Improved practical guidance could cover account safety, evidence retention, reporting and disengagement where necessary.

The finding of the Working Group in respect of the systems in place for this principle is Comprehensive. Improvements could include periodic refresher training, better central recording, thematic and post-incident review, clearer online-safety material and reminders about the risk-management tools already available.

2.5 Principle 3: Creating an Infrastructure

A formal process exists for reporting and responding to abuse and harassment. Members can use the Portal or contact Democratic Services directly. The Head of Democratic Services and team act as the principal point of contact, maintain records, provide advice and coordinate the response according to seriousness and circumstances.

The response can involve Health and Safety, Neighbourhood Services, Community Protection, senior officers, the Monitoring Officer and South Yorkshire Police. Where direct contact is made, an internal form can be completed so the concern is recorded and escalated where appropriate. Confidential political group support is also available.

For online cases, reports and evidence may be collated for Operation Ford and the police and content may be reported to platforms. Some material has been removed for breaching platform rules, while other content has remained as below action thresholds. Detailed logs, screenshots, references and audit trails are therefore important.

The Working Group heard that guidance exists through the handbook, portal, induction materials, briefing slides, bulletins and check-ins. The Group considered whether policies on vexatious contact, social media, lone working, threats and IT contact controls could be repurposed or extended to Members. Any change would require clear ownership and legal, information-governance and operational review.

The Working Group finding in this area was that the systems are Comprehensive and benchmarking suggested the Council compares well. Improvements could include a further awareness and reinforcement of the reporting pathway, refreshed guidance, consistent recording, annual effectiveness review and consideration of an adaptation of existing policies.

2.6 Principle 4: Creating connections

The Group examined links with South Yorkshire Police, Operation Ford, neighbourhood policing and wider partnerships. Operation Ford strengthens protective security and policing support for specified elected roles. The Group heard possible offences should still be reported through 999, 101 or online routes and identified as Operation Ford incidents.

The Head of Democratic Services has liaison arrangements with police contacts and intelligence is shared about specific matters, trends and emerging risks. Security briefings have been provided to Members and reporting routes are explained through induction and communications.

Neighbourhood Services and local partnerships also contribute. The Working Group heard that community forums are not substitutes for formal reporting, but relationships can provide informal support, signposting and opportunities to raise wider safety concerns. Data-sharing and regular liaison help identify patterns and escalation.

The concern was not the absence of connections but limited tangible outcomes in some cases. Extensive intelligence may be shared while conduct remains below police, prosecution or platform thresholds. Repeated incidents can have a serious cumulative impact even when individual communications are assessed separately.

Consistent reporting remains important because a cumulative record supports risk assessment and pattern identification. The Group felt clearer feedback after reports would be beneficial and more explicit evaluation of how partnership interventions improve safety, confidence and outcomes.

The Working Group finding is that the systems in place in this context are Comprehensive, with some outcomes dependent on external agencies. The Group felt the Council should maintain liaison, encourage full reporting, seek feedback and evaluation, continue briefings and raise systemic concerns through the LGA, regional networks and appropriate governmental channels.

2.7 Principle 5: Creating a culture of safety and respect

The Working Group felt that this principle presented a clear opportunity for visible further action. The toolkit describes zero tolerance as aspirational and locally defined, while lawful criticism, scrutiny and robust disagreement must remain protected. The Group considered internal support stronger than the public promotion of these values.

The Group agreed that the cross-party motion considered by Council on 15th July 2026 provides a democratic mandate. It commits the Council to challenge normalisation of abuse, sign up to the LGA campaign, maintain reporting, review support, work with police and take a zero-tolerance approach to abuse

of councillors and officers, all issues underpinned by the matters considered by the Working Group.

The Code of Conduct addresses bullying, harassment and intimidation, and the handbook contains relevant safety material. The Group felt that the Council should nevertheless communicate a shared understanding of what crosses the line into abuse, what respectful engagement means and what action may be taken, without suggesting that criticism itself is unacceptable.

The LGA provides campaign materials which can support local activity. The Group favoured an integrated and sustained approach rather than a one-off gesture. Potential channels included social media, email signatures, posters, bulletins, messages at meetings, ward correspondence and moderation rules on Council channels.

The Group felt that activity could use anonymised case studies, testimonials or national examples. The Group thought it would be helpful for the Council to more widely explain the impact of abuse and set expectations for engagement.

The Working Group finding for this Principle was Partial, with a strong platform for improvement following the motion. The Working Group recommended a Communications and Engagement Plan defining ownership, audiences, messages, channels and review arrangements.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 The alternative option would be for the Committee not to accept or endorse the findings of the Debate Not Hate Working Group. This is not recommended, as it would miss the opportunity to build on the work undertaken by the Working Group and to strengthen the relevant systems and arrangements within the Council.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 The Working Group considered information and evidence from Democratic Services, Legal Services, Human Resources, Health and Safety, Neighbourhoods, Communications and police liaison arrangements

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

The timescales for implementing the recommendations of the Working Group are set out in the Action Plan at Appendix ..

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 The officer time in dealing with this issue is met within existing Legal Services resources and the resources of those other Services referred to above.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 The Council and the Standards and Ethics Committee have a statutory duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct. The adoption of the recommendations as set out within this report, will contribute to the promotion and maintenance of high standards of conduct.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

None

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

None

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

None

11. Implications for Partners

None

12. Risks and Mitigation

None

13. Accountable Officer(s)

Bal Nahal, Head of Legal Services

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Appendix 1 – Action Plan

Action	Lead	Review point
Create Member wellbeing guide/portal	Democratic Services / HR	6 months
Provide ongoing Health and Safety training	Democratic Services / H&S / HR	Annual
Reinforce awareness around reporting pathways	Democratic Services	3 months
Annual thematic assurance review of incidents	Democratic services & Monitoring Officer	12 months
Refresh Health and Safety handbook	H&S / Democratic Services	6 months
Maintain police liaison	Democratic Services	Ongoing
Deliver communications plan	Communications / Democratic Services	3 to 12 months
Parish and town council signposting of available resources	Democratic Services / Neighbourhoods	6 months
Various other matters referred to in Debate not Hate Report of 10 th Sept 2026	Legal Services	6 months

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Health & Safety Handbook for Elected Members

A Handbook aimed to assist Elected Members in understanding what measures can be taken to prevent issues arising and how to deal with those rare circumstances should Elected Members be concerned for their safety or feel vulnerable.

Date	Lead
Updated July 2025	Emma Hill, Head of Democratic Services Democratic Services, Assistant Chief Executive's Directorate

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1. Introduction

 [Page 7 Section 3.2 of the Council's Health and Safety Policy](#) sets out the roles and responsibilities of all Elected Members in terms of Health and Safety.

Being at the heart of the communities you serve and staying in touch is what being a councillor is about. This includes helping individuals with any problems they might have, dealing with community tensions and addressing wider community issues. Often this extends beyond just the delivery of council services. These contacts are usually rewarding and non-adversarial. However, Elected Members can find themselves in a position where they need to manage angry and frustrated residents who often contact their elected representative when they feel that they have no other avenue to pursue. Often Elected Members will deal with constituents on a face to face basis when alone.

In many cases, considering and maintaining personal safety and security is common sense. Elected Members should always assess the level of risk and what arrangements are in place for their safety.

Most Elected Members will go through their entire service without experiencing any problems, but a little preparation and planning can reduce any risk.

The purpose of this guide is not to make you nervous but to act as a reminder regarding what measures can be taken to prevent issues arising and how to deal with those rare circumstances should you be concerned for your safety or feel vulnerable.

Elected Members are encouraged to:

- Be vigilant at all times and report anything suspicious
- Assess risks to personal in carrying out their public duties
- Ensure you fully close doors behind you and are not tailgated
- Wear your ID badge in council buildings and remove this on leaving, and challenge anyone without an appropriate ID/visitor badge
- Recognise potential danger from personal contact or internet/postal communication and take appropriate action
- Be proactive in considering personal safety through, for instance, the purchase of personal alarm, ensuring the Council, your partner, friend or relative has information on your activities, and ensuring your mobile telephone is charged
- If possible, vary daily routines, such as leaving and returning home at the same time or on the same route.

This guidance is based on that issued by the Local Government Association and aims to help you carry out your role safely and effectively (<https://www.local.gov.uk/personal-safety>)

2. Dealing with Emotions and Behaviours

It is inevitable that some of the people you will meet will be angry or upset. Calmness in the face of whatever comes up will help you and your constituents.

If you are subjected to offensive, threatening, intimidating, racist, homophobic or derogatory remarks, you are advised not to respond as this could make the situation worse, and instead you should bring the meeting to an end and seek assistance. It is recommended that you take a detailed note of the incident and person(s) involved and report the incident.

In these circumstances you must use your own judgement. If you are alone and in a vulnerable situation, do not put yourself at risk, no matter angry or upset the remark makes you.

Some constituents may have additional needs or a mental health condition, and it is important that they are still able to seek advice and representation. In some circumstances suitable adjustments may need to be made and advice can be sought from Democratic Services.

3. Ward Surgeries

The arrangements each councillor makes will vary according to local circumstances.

The following suggestions will help make a surgery safe and effective – some apply wherever the surgery is held while others are good practice to be followed:

- Do not hold surgeries alone in an otherwise empty building. A receptionist can make you feel safer and make it easier to manage a busy surgery. If you are doing surgeries alone, discuss how this can be changed with fellow Elected Members or council officers.
- Consider the layout of the room i.e. you should sit nearest to the door with the constituents 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 ensure that the waiting constituents are as far as possible away from those whom you are talking to.
- Make sure there are no heavy items in the room that could be used as Weapons.
- Have a plan for any helpers or staff regarding what to do in an emergency. This could include having an emergency word or phrase you can use to ask for assistance.
- Have an incident logbook to record all types of incidents.
- Conduct the following room checks:
 - Ensure the room is not secluded and is in view of the reception or public area.
 - Is connected to the reception by an alarm and has a procedure for dealing with a call for assistance.

- Has a vision panel in the door.
 - Has a swift means of escape and any visitors are not able to lock the door from the inside.
- When looking for suitable premises consider:
 - Council premises (e.g. libraries) during opening hours.
 - Other premises where there are many other people about.
 - Premises where the names of any visitors for Elected Members are recorded and where there is a comfortable waiting area.

4. Home Visits

In some circumstances you may need to visit residents in their homes, especially those who are elderly, disabled, have additional needs or where they simply want you to see the conditions that are the subject of complaints.

It is for you to decide whether a home visit should be made, especially if the person to be visited is unknown to you. You should consider potential alternatives such as a telephone call where possible, and if you have any doubts about your safety or the premises you are visiting and the purpose of the visit is not about the premises itself, the meeting should be arranged at a neutral venue. If you are ever in doubt or feel threatened during a home visit, do not enter the property or make an excuse and leave.

Notification of Homes with Known Issues

The Council has a corporate database of homes with known issues 'Hazard Warning Database'. Elected Members can seek contact from designated officers in the Council to check about potential issues prior to undertaking a home visit or meeting with a named individual.

Elected Members are asked to follow the process as set out below:

- Details of the intention to visit a property or meeting a named individual in the borough should be raised in the first instance with the Member and Civic Support Unit (membersupport@rotherham.gov.uk) copied to the Corporate Health and Safety Team by emailing (healthandsafety@rotherham.gov.uk).
- The Corporate Health and Safety Team will provide a response to the Member and Civic Support Unit providing the appropriate information and guidance, who will in turn liaise with the Elected Member.
- Staff in the Member and Civic Support Unit will ensure this information is confidentially logged / noted on file so there is a formal record that the information and guidance has been provided by the Corporate Health and Safety Team.
- The Elected Member should act on the information and guidance provided by the Member and Civic Support Unit and ensure that the same process is followed in future if planning to revisit the same property or meet the same named individual given changing circumstances which will result in the Council's database being updated on a regular basis.

If you are planning on undertaking a home visit you should consider:

- Arranging the visit during normal working and daylight hours.
- Refer to the corporate database for known violent customers.
- Let somebody know who you are visiting, providing details of address, date and time of visit and expected duration.
- Keep a record of your whereabouts. This might include making a call on your mobile during the home visit, telling the resident that there is such a record or that you are expected elsewhere at a specific time.

During the home visit you are advised to:

- Consider calling the person before the meeting to confirm arrangements and establish their mood/state of mind
- Set up a code word or phrase for use on the telephone that you can use to raise the alarm
- Park your car so that it can be driven away easily and park in a well-lit area near other vehicles
- Stay alert and assess the situation – assess the mood of the resident(s) and be aware of potential weapons or dogs
- Sit in an area or chair near exit routes
- If you are unable to leave immediately should a serious situation occur, you should:
 - Place defensive barriers between yourself and the resident
 - Continue talking to the resident, reassuring them that you mean them no harm
 - Set off your personal alarm or scream or shout to attract the attention of others
 - Use reasonable force to protect yourself as a last resort.

If a serious situation occurs, vacate the premises immediately.

5. Lone Working

At times Elected Members will have to deal with constituents when alone. In these circumstances you should consider:

- Leaving details of where you are going and how long you will be with a partner, friend or colleague
- Checking that your mobile telephone is charged and switched on
- Carrying a personal alarm
- Checking the corporate database for known violent customers –
- Making regular check-in calls to a partner, friend or colleague or asking them to call you at regular intervals
- Teaming up with another councillor in your own or a neighbouring ward
- Carrying out a risk assessment – guidance on how to carry out a risk assessment can be found on the [Council's intranet](#), along with example risk assessments for lone working and home visits.

6. Attendance at Meetings

You may often be required to attend evening meetings which sometimes finish after dark. It is possible that depending on the nature and outcome of the meeting that members of the public may leave feeling angry or upset. In such instances, you may wish to ask to be accompanied to your car or nearest public transport by colleagues or officers present.

When parking your car, you should try to park in well-lit areas, take boxes/bags to the car when other people are around and lock car doors straight away.

7. Ad-hoc visits by constituents to the Town Hall

Constituents may arrive at the Town Hall and want an immediate response to their concern or query. In these circumstances caution should be exercised, particularly if the person is aggravated. If you do need to meet them, ensure an officer accompanies you, waiting outside the door to be on hand to give assistance if needed.

8. Personal callers to private home

Most Elected Members seek to maintain a balance between their personal and public lives and do not want to encourage any callers at their private homes.

As a person with a public profile it is advisable to maintain a decent level and awareness of home security.

Good publicity regarding how to contact Elected Members and details of ward surgeries reduces the chances of unwanted callers. The Council publicises the contact details for each Councillor and details of ward surgeries to reduce unwanted callers, see the [RMBC website](#).

If a visit is to take place at your private home, it is recommended that this only takes place via a pre-arranged appointment, ideally with another person present. It is not advised that you see an unannounced caller in your home.

If you believe you are safe, try to ascertain the nature of the issue they want to discuss, conducting any discussion outside the house.

If more than one individual who are not known to you turns up unannounced and you are concerned that they pose a threat, it is advisable to contact the police and decline to open the door.

If an unknown individual(s) turns up unannounced and you are concerned that they pose a threat, you have any doubts as to someone's intention or if they appear angry/aggressive, then you should contact the Police.

9. Online Abuse

Good digital citizenship encourages the labelling of abusive and inappropriate online material so that both the perpetrator and others viewing it can also know it is not acceptable.

You are best placed to determine whether a post or interaction is abusive or intimidating.

Any intimidation or abuse on social media is subject to all the same potential criminal prosecutions as other forms of intimidation, with the additional criminal offences relating specifically to electronic communications.

If you receive online abuse you may wish to unfollow, mute or even block the person or group who is persistently tweeting you or is being abusive or intimidatory. Even if you are not overly concerned you should consider keeping a record and reporting should any incidents escalate in the future. You can simply 'screen shot', 'clip' or 'snip' tweets or posts on your phone, tablet or computer. You may also decide to warn the perpetrator that you find the communication abusive, intimidatory or threatening and that you are keeping a record.

If you are concerned about comments or posts in a group or page, you can report the post to the group administrator. If you are concerned about a group that is abusive and you think it has broken Facebook's Community Standards, you can report the group to Facebook.

If you think there are threats to your personal safety or security, you should contact Democratic Services to seek advice from the Police.

Every situation will be different, and it will need a personal judgement about whether it is worthwhile to pursue the incident, ignore it or politely acknowledge.

10. Hate Crime

Hate crime is an incident or crime which is perceived to be motivated by prejudice or hostility (or perceived to be so) against a person's:

- Race – nationality, ethnicity, skin colour and heritage
- Faith – religion, belief, non-religious belief
- Disability – physical, hearing and visual impairments, mental ill health and learning disabilities
- Sexual orientation – people who identify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual or heterosexual

- Gender identity – people who identify as ‘trans’ including transgender or transsexual people

It can include things like:

- Physical assault
- Damage to property
- Offensive graffiti
- Arson
- Inciting hatred online.

If you experience or witness a crime you should report it. This will enable appropriate support to be provided to you or the victim and prevent others from becoming victims.

11. Harassment & Stalking

You have the right to feel safe in your home and workplace.

Stalking is illegal and can include being followed or constantly harassed by another person.

Stalking can happen with or without a fear of violence e.g. receiving persistent unwanted contact that are causing you distress.

Harassment and stalking could include:

- Malicious and nuisance telephone calls

Elected Members may get nuisance or abusive calls and become the target of a persistent, anonymous caller who may have a grudge against you or 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 etc.
- 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 (E.g. railway sounds, industrial noises, machinery, music, animals)
- Inform the Council and Police.

- Mail

Elected Members on rare occasions may become the target of malicious anonymous letters. As such any letters should be reported immediately.

Further advice and guidance is available on the National Stalking Helpline, Telephone: 0808 802 0300 or visit [National Stalking Helpline](#)

12. Community Tensions & Demonstrations

Due to the nature of the difficult decisions that Elected Members have to make, you may experience a protest against such decisions. If this does occur:

- Stay calm – such protests may feel intimidating but will not necessarily lead to a physical threat
- Remain inside, close and lock doors and windows and draw the curtains/blinds
- Inform the police
- It is not recommended to confront the protesters
- If you are concerned that the protest is an aggressive one, and it is safe for you to do so, note descriptions of individuals and vehicles present so you can pass these onto the police.

Any demonstrations should also be reported to the Council.

As you fulfil your role as a Councillor, you may also find tensions arising within the local community. These can arise for a variety of reasons and every community will contain groups of people with conflicting views. By listening to local people and knowing your ward well, you may be able to not only better understand any tensions arising but also be able to prevent and resolve conflict between groups.

If you find significant local tensions or conflicts arising, it is important to:

- Use questioning to understand issues better, generate thoughts and challenge extreme views or misinformation
- Bring people together – facilitate respect, open debate and agreement
- Resolve conflict by establishing empathy, encouraging people to explore options together and identifying common ground between groups.

13. Reporting

Call 999 or the Police if you or someone else is in immediate danger or a severe incident occurs.

If you are subject to unacceptable behaviour or an accident or incident occurs, record as much as you can, including descriptions and follow the reporting process, no matter how minor.

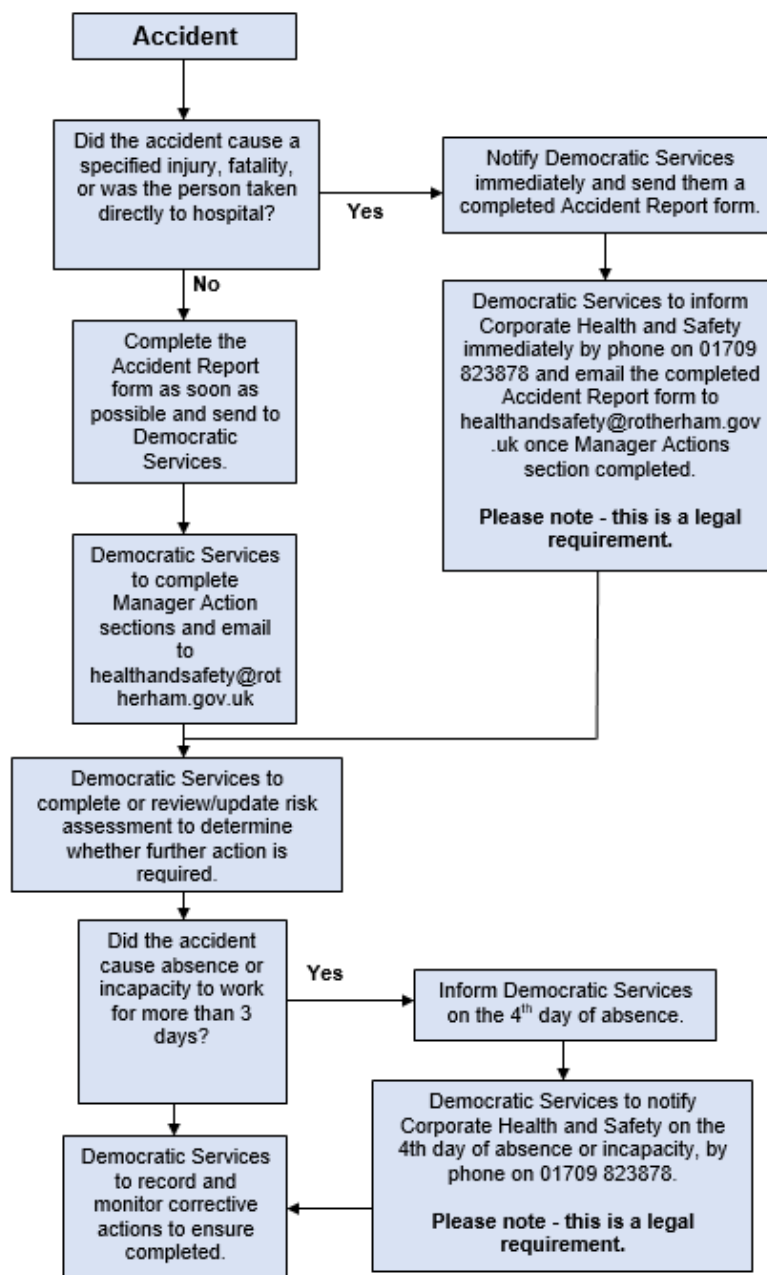
Incidents should be reported to Democratic Services as soon as possible to allow the Health and Safety Team to be informed and to ensure that the incident is investigated and appropriate action taken. Emma Hill, Head of Democratic Services, is the single point of access for all Members (emma.hill@rotherham.gov.uk).

All incidents will be reported to the Chief Executive. This enables the authority to undertake proper monitoring and decide if any action is needed to prevent a recurrence.

You may also consider it advisable to warn ward colleagues.

Members should be aware of how to report accidents and incidents of aggressive or violent behaviour. The reporting processes for accidents and violence/aggression at work are outlined below.

Accident reporting procedure



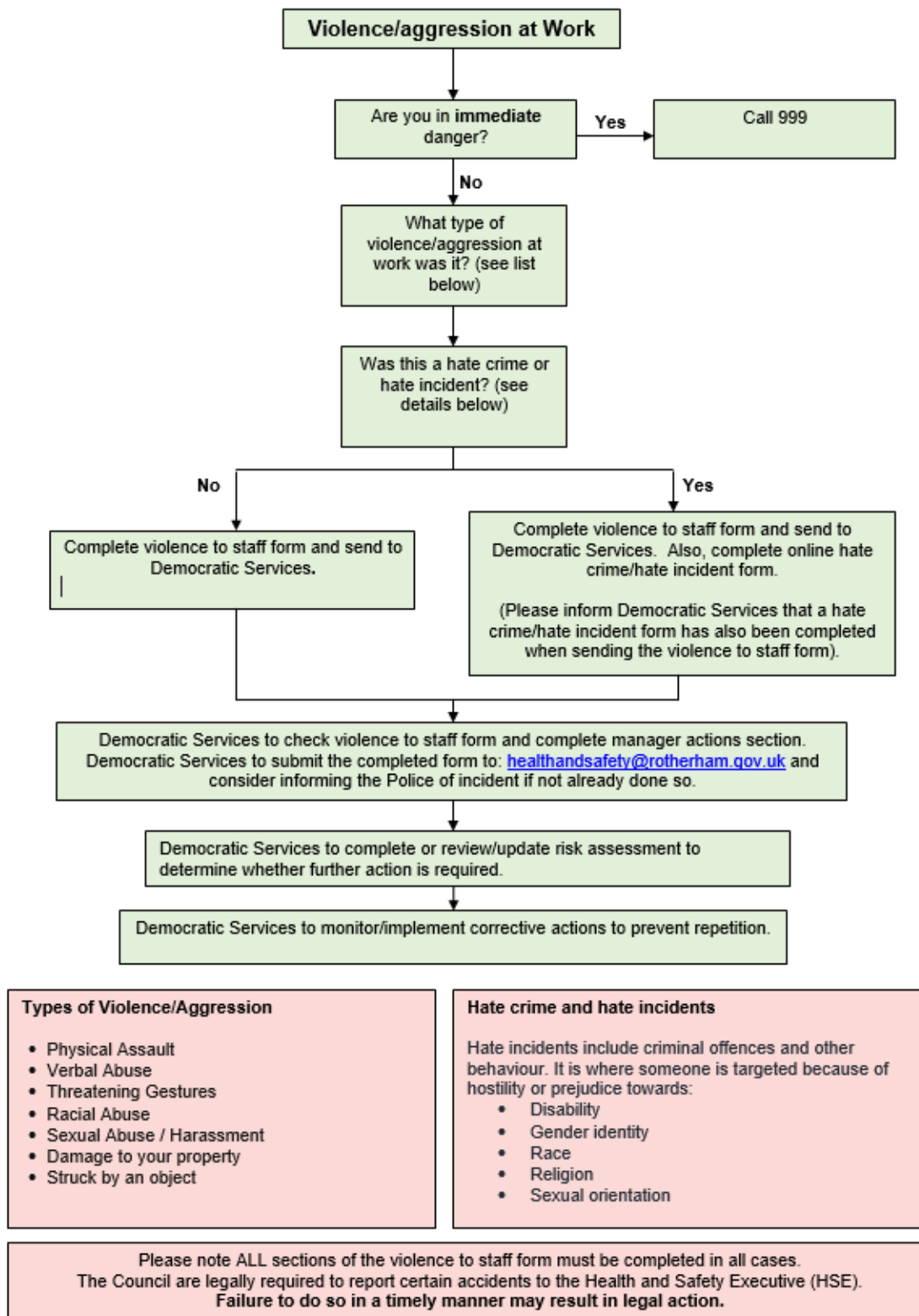
Specified Injury

The list of 'specified injuries' in RIDDOR 2013 (regulation 4):

- Fractures, other than fingers, thumbs or toes
- Amputations
- Injury likely to lead to permanent loss of sight or reduction in sight
- Any crush injury to the head or torso causing damage to the brain or internal organs
- Serious burns (covering over 10% of the body)
- Loss of consciousness caused by head injury or asphyxia.

- Link to [Accident Report Form](#)

Violence/aggression at work reporting procedure



- Link to [Violence to Staff Report Form](#) and [Hate Crime or Hate Incident Form](#)

14. Training

The Council is responsible for the safety of Elected Members while on council business and members are encouraged to attend the training which is provided to ensure they are prepared and equipped to deal with difficult situations.

Equality training is provided to equip Councilor's with the tools and techniques to effectively challenge prejudice and to promote inclusive and respectful behaviors in meetings.

Personal safety training will also be included as part of the new Member Induction Programme following elections.

15. Member & Civic Support Unit

Support for Members is co-ordinated through the Member and Civic Support Unit who can be contacted via membersupport@rotherham.gov.uk.

The Team also oversees the encouragement of Members attendance at training events and seminars to ensure they are prepared and equipped to deal with difficult situations.

16. Useful Links

- Personal Safety - [Practical advice for handling online abuse | Local Government Association](#)
- [LGA: A Councillor's Workbook on Facilitation and Conflict Resolution](#)
- [National Stalking Helpline](#)
- [Violence to Staff Report Form](#)
- [Health and Safety - Reporting a Health and Safety incident](#)
- [Hate Crime or Hate Incident Form](#)
- [Accident Report Form](#)

RECORD OF AMENDMENTS

Date Amended	Description of Changes	Amended by
16 th April 2024	Links to access key documents and forms updated.	Emma Hill
11 th July 2025	Introduction – inclusion of link to the Council's Health and Safety Policy which sets out the roles and responsibilities of all Elected Members in terms of Health and Safety.	Emma Hill

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