

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
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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.

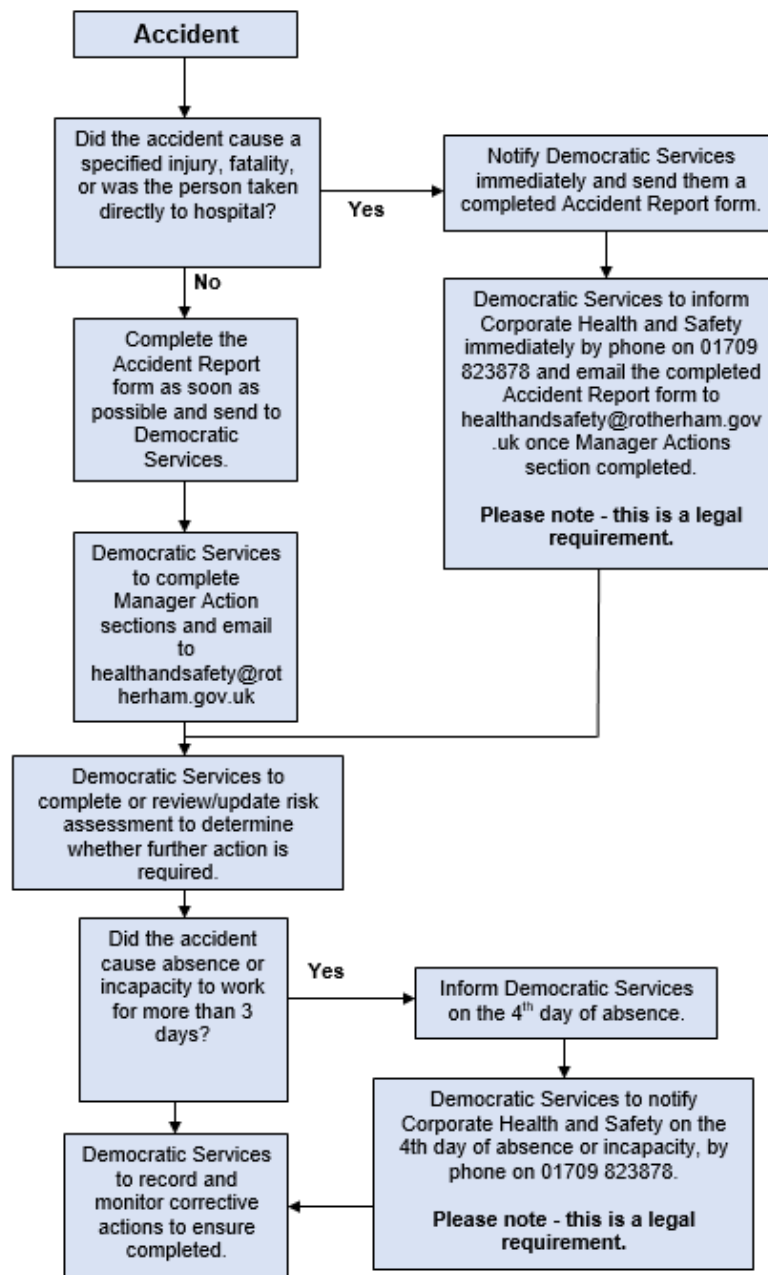
Incidents should be reported to Democratic Services as soon as possible to allow the Health and Safety Team to be informed and to ensure that the incident is investigated and appropriate action taken. Emma Hill, Head of Democratic Services, is the single point of access for all Members (emma.hill@rotherham.gov.uk).

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



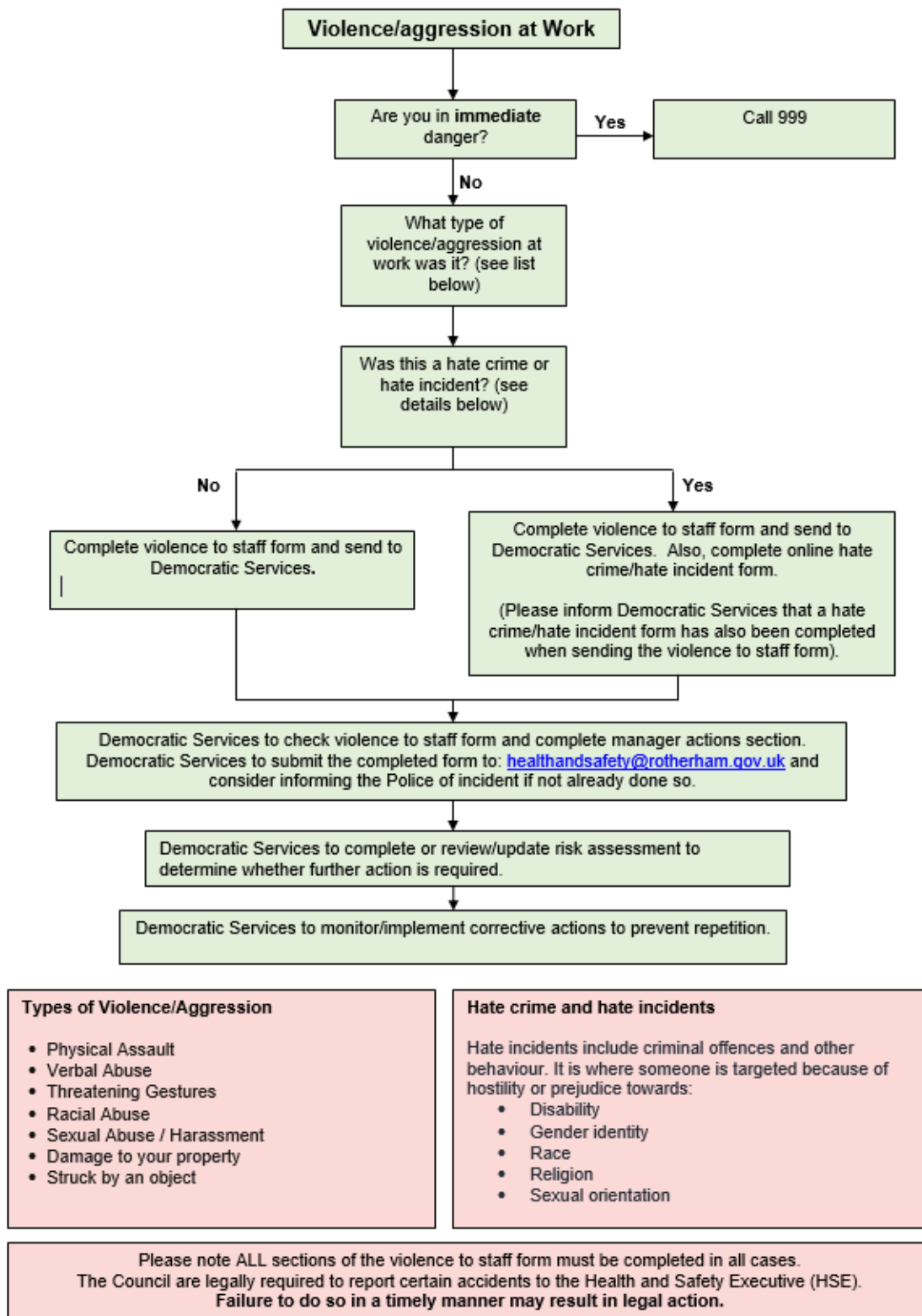
Specified Injury

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 Councilors 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