Transformation and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report of the Member Bullying and Harassment Task and Finish Group

June 2025

Acknowledgments

The Member Bullying and Harassment Task and Finish Group worked enthusiastically, listened to expert witnesses, evaluated viewpoints, and made well-supported conclusions in light of the evidence they had heard.

The group would like to thank everyone who assisted them with their investigation, but with particular mention to those Members who courageously shared their experiences of Bullying or Harassment, within the safe confine of these meetings. Members recognised that this must have been very difficult and emotive but appreciated the value of this insight in developing their understanding.

Members of the Task and Finish Group

Councillor Ruth Houghton (Chair)
Councillor Julian Dean
Councillor Joyce Barrow
Councillor David Evans
Councillor Roger Evans
Councillor Caroline Bagnall
Councillor Kevin Pardy

Contents

Section	Title	Page no.
1	Context	4
2	Scope of the work	4
3	Objectives	5
4	What the Task and Finish group have done	6
5	Key Findings	9
6	Conclusions	10
7	Recommendations	11

1. Context

The report of the Staff focussed Bullying and Harassment Task and Finish group which was presented to Transformation and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny on the 19th February 2024 included a number of key recommendations. These included the setting up of the Member focussed Task and Finish group, in order to consider some of the specific challenges and pressures that elected Members might face whilst undertaking their duties.

"It became apparent during the initial stages of the task and finish group. There is no such policy for Members, whilst it is understood there is guidance from the Local Government Association (LGA) this isn't deemed sufficient in protecting Members during their duties. A further task and finish group is being recommended to review support in relation to Bullying and Harassment for Members" [1]

In order to understand the context of the work of this Task and Finish group, Members drew upon both national evidence and local Member experiences. During the course of this they learned that there had been an increase in levels of abuse towards those in public life, which may deter people from wanting to stand as local councillors.

"Abuse towards people in local government is getting so severe it is putting democracy at risk, groups representing them have warned" [2]

Elected Members play a significant role in local democracy, in representing their communities and serving as an important link between councils and residents. However, the rising levels of abuse and intimidation are shown to be affecting politicians and democracy at all levels. The nature of their position, the increased risk associated with public visibility and the correlation between the ease of exploitation through social media, have contributed to these challenges.

"There is a growing feeling that abuse and intimidation, particularly online, are becoming normalised"[3]

Throughout the course of their investigation Task and Finish group Members were saddened to learn of the number of cases of harassment that had been experienced amongst their colleagues, and this further urged them in seeking suitable protocols and measures of support to safeguard one another.

2. Scope of the work

The aims of Task and Finish group included building assurance for all Members that their concerns would be listened to, and any incidents would be reported and given the appropriate level of response. Members of the Task and Finish group were keen to ensure that clear and consistent procedures were established around all Member Bullying and Harassment incidents, whether in person, online, or by any other means.

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[1] Shropshire Council Healthy Communities Scrutiny Committee – Diabetes task and Finish Group
[2] Abuse of councillors and staff putting democracy at risk, say local government groups - BBC News
[3] The Personal Safety of Councillors (moderngov.co.uk)

Thus, ensuring that Shropshire Council promotes a respectful workplace, where all colleagues are valued, and disrespectful behaviour is not tolerated. By providing support and resources for individuals experiencing bullying or harassment.

Making officers and Members aware of these protocols, how to access them, the different roles and responsibilities of those involved, and what they should do when they are made aware of a concern. As well as the importance of reporting all incidents so that they can be recorded and potential trends identified.

The scope of work also considered ways in which Members can help safeguard themselves, by increasing their personal awarenesses, and promoting ways in which they can stay safe online. Members acknowledged that this might also include setting the tone through appropriate culture and behaviours. Including mindfulness around constructive debate as opposed to engaging in personalised attacks.

<u>Objectives</u>

- To develop an understanding of the volume and nature of incidents of Member bullying and harassment and the level of concern / threat experienced. In order to understand the scale of the issue and its impact.

- To consider the appropriate course of action that will be undertaken by officers and elected Members in response to any incident of Member bullying or harassment.

- Establishment of a protocol that will set out the timescales for reporting, as well as who is responsible at each level when managing these situations

- Communication of the protocol to appropriate staff and all Members, including adding it to the Member Gateway for ease of reference.

- Determination of when the police should be made aware.

- Ensure that all incidents are logged, and recorded effectively, and that reporting of them is encouraged so that they can be recorded and trends can be identified.

- Explore provision of support to Members who are experiencing bullying or harassment including consideration of a Member mental health and wellbeing champion.

- Promote Member safety, encouraging checks around personal awareness, mindfulness of culture and behaviour, and increased social media awareness.

3. What has the Task and Finish group done?

The Member led Task and Finish group was established to review gaps in support and share intelligence of common experiences. This group comprised, as much as possible, of those Members who were involved in the Officer Bullying and Harassment Task and Finish group, as directed in the report to Transformation and Improvement Overview and Scrutiny on the 19th February 2024

This cross party group met several times over the year to explore this subject at length including speaking with witnesses to gather evidence which helped inform their approach. They also reviewed national guidance and compared this with what Shropshire Council already has in place to review where there might be gaps to be addressed.

The Local Government Association has developed a self-assessment toolkit aimed at assisting Local Authorities in evaluating how they respond to abuse and intimidation directed at councillors. This toolkit was utilised at the onset of this Task and Finish group process to gain insight into what processes are already in place. The group also reached out to other authorities through the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to understand how they address issues around Member bullying or harassment.

All of this research helped to determine the approach of the Task and Finish group, and their guiding principles which included having a zero tolerance approach to abuse, with defined processes in place and clear roles and responsibilities so that Councillors know who to contact and how their concerns will be taken forward.

The Task and Finish Group first met on the 26th November 2024 and discussed options around implementing a draft protocol and flowchart to give a clear line of direction to responsible officers and to elected Members, should an incident occur.

It was emphasized that should a Member feel any sense of concern or threat, they must call the police immediately, this would always be the first point of contact.

The proposed flowchart and protocol would set out how the Council manage, report and support such incidents. Shropshire Council's Senior Health and Safety Officer confirmed that reporting all incidents was crucial for recording purposes and data analysis around detecting any patterns of behaviour. Even in cases that might be considered to be trivial, reporting could help understand wider contextual concerns and piece together a fuller picture. A persons of concern register can be also set up in order that any patterns of reported incidents are flagged and, if appropriate to do so, shared. It was recognised that GDPR requirements would have to be adhered to.

The group discussed how political Group Leaders can support and signpost their Elected Members and noted that Independent Members will not have the same access to a support network. It was also acknowledged that party leaders and the authority each have their own levels of responsibility. Additionally, having some form of personal safety hints and tips published on the Members Gateway, would be a helpful guide.

Members suggested inviting the police to attend a future meeting to aid their understanding around the scale of the issue, and the appropriate level of response, as well as explaining the help and advice available.

Therefore, the Member Bullying and Harassment Task and Finish Group invited Detective Constable Paul Arundale the West Mercia Police Force Elected Official Advisor to join their meeting on the on the 13th December 2024

At this meeting Detective Constable Arundale explained that he is keen to understand some of the bullying and harassment challenges and issues elected Members face, whether online, or in person. He also shared the following document with the group detailing some of the additional policing response being planned to support democracy in Local Government nationally - https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/defending-democracy-policing-protocol/defending-democracy-policing-protocol

As a result of this conversation the Task and Finish group members felt it would be important to invite all Shropshire Council elected Members to join their next meeting on the 13th January, to meet with Detective Constable Arundale and understand more about the work he is doing to support Councillors. The Task and Finish group also emailed all Members to offer them the opportunity to share any personal experiences at the 13th January meeting should they wish to do so.

All Shropshire Council Members were also emailed a copy of the draft documents being prepared around incident reporting and personal safety for their comments and consideration, as well as the Defending Democracy document referenced in the link above.

On the 13th January 2025 all Shropshire Council elected Members were invited to join the Member Bullying and Harassment Task and Finish group in meeting with Detective Constable Paul Arundale from West Mercia Police. At this meeting Detective Constable Arundale explained his role as the appointed Force Elected Official Advisor for West Mercia, adding that this is a newly established role within the police as a result of increasing incidents.

Each police force will now have a Force Elected-Official Advisor, although crimes should still be reported as usual via 999 or 101, the reporter is encouraged to specify if the victim is a councillor or candidate. The establishment of this post is linked to Operation Bridger - a nationwide police protection security programme which offers support to Members of Parliament - Operation Ford is being rolled out to support local councillors and candidates.

Members of the Task and Finish group were told that Detective Constable Arundale would be conducting security briefings across West Mercia, though dates are yet to be confirmed. The briefings will include information around personal security, measures for safety when out and about canvassing, and safety when meeting with constituents.

During the meeting Detective Constable Arundale explained that he wanted to seek an understanding of issues faced by Councillors within the Shropshire area. Members of the Task and Finish group were particularly saddened to hear examples of some significant threats received amongst their colleagues including threats to personal safety and vandalism of their own homes. Those Members who shared their experiences were able to describe the impact these had had upon them and their immediate families, and the support received from the police in handling these. Particular incidents of violence or intimidation included threats from a person with a shotgun, incidents of dog mess through letter boxes, derogatory comments upon appearance, and disturbing e-mails.

Members were keen to understand distinguish between what might be perceived as criminal or threatening behaviour with that of normal political challenge. Recognising that it might become easy, in public life, to normalise behaviour which should not be tolerated, believing it to be just part of the territory or what they have signed up for.

Detective Constable Arundale explained that increasingly the internet has become a platform for complaints to MPs and elected officials, this amounts to being a criminal offence when it becomes more threatening in nature. Acknowledging that these might need to be explored on a case by case basis, distinctions can be made between what amounts to general online grumbling, malicious communication and extreme posts along the lines of threats to kill. In general, this is often under reported however regardless of whether threatening behaviour is experienced in person or online, it should be reported by default. Members recognised how reporting could link into the wider picture that the police could already be following up on.

Members also recognised the importance of setting the tone more widely by not engaging in personal attacks or criticisms of one another particularly in the press or at Committee meetings which are live streamed and can be viewed widely. Recognising that encouraging a culture of 'debate not hate' would set standards amongst politicians, showing that abuse of any form is not tolerated. These standards might also include encouraging all Members to speak up about any unacceptable behaviour they experience or observe.

On the 26th February 2025 the Task and Finish Group met with a key witness, an elected Member colleague, who was keen to share their recent experiences of harassment and how these were responded to internally. This conversation highlighted the importance of having clearly defined protocols in place in future, to ensure that both Members and Officers feel supported in both the reporting and handling of incidents. The proposed protocol at Appendix A was discussed and agreed by the group.

The proposed flowchart, at Appendix B, was shared on screen for all to comment upon. This flowchart is designed to set the direction moving forwards, including briefing frontline staff and raising awareness of its existence. All agreed that this was a positive step in setting out clear guidance and would be strengthened by continual review and learning, particularly after each time an incident has taken place. It was recognised by all that in any cases of immediate concern calling the police would always be the first port of call.

It was also suggested that an agreed alert phrase amongst officers and Members be applied to any related emails or MSTeams messages so that these were immediately obvious in any messaging inbox.

The Task and Finish Group discussed rural proofing and the differing nature of threats that might be encountered in a rural setting as opposed to an urban one. The group agreed that the guidance notes for Members safety, at Appendix C, should include useful hints and tips for keeping safe when out and about particularly when in a rural setting. For example, using phone tracking apps, telling friends/colleagues where you are going for how long, and how to keep in touch. It was recognised that the Members Safety information at Appendix C is not exhaustive but would provide some helpful hints and tips that may be useful for Members to be aware of.

4. Key Findings

Recognising that Member Bullying and Harassment is an increasing issue, that is becoming a potential threat to democracy and might discourage people from standing as a local councillor, the Member Bullying Task and Finish group explored the nature of threats/incidents experienced amongst their colleagues and the impact of these upon their professional and personal lives.

The group recognised that the Local Government Association (LGA) reported in July 2023 that "*81 per cent (8 in 10 councillors) reported having experienced intimidation and/or abuse in their role as a councillor in the last year,*" [4]

Having considered all the evidence described above, and following meetings with a number of witnesses, the Task and Finish group ratified the proposed protocol, flowchart and Members safety guidance information recommending that it would be published on the Members Gateway for Members awareness and reference (Appendices A to C). They also agreed that this should be shared with frontline officers to increase understanding of how to handle the report of a suspected threat or incident. They all agreed that appropriate incident reporting should be in place, that would be tracked and monitored in order to understand any patterns of behaviour that might be informative in guarding against future incidents.

The Task and Finish group also understood the different roles that political parties, Group Leaders, and the Council itself played in supporting Members in carrying out their roles as Councillors.

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[4] LGA: Number of councillors feeling personally at risk in role reaches new high | Local Government Association

5. Conclusions

The Member Bullying and Harassment Task and Finish group worked thoroughly to fulfil the recommendation that had been made by the Officer Bullying and Harassment Task and Finish group in relation to Member Bullying. They were keen to understand the extent of the issue and explored the varying ways in which bullying or harassment might occur, appreciating that this could be in person, over social media, by way of a threat or vandalism. Whilst many Members won't face issues, the Task and Finish group concluded that it was vital to know how to prevent and handle any possible incidents, should they occur.

In order to understand the increase in the number of incidents and the nature of these, a reporting mechanism was agreed upon, with protocols in place to ensure that incidents are logged, elected Members are supported, and police are involved as appropriate.

The Task and Finish group were keen to implement these measures as soon as possible with reference to the upcoming election and induction of new Members so that this is in place for their induction and is easily accessible on the Member Gateway.

The agreed protocol and flowchart is now live on the Member Gateway -
https://shropshirecouncil.sharepoint.com/sites/CH/mw

6. Recommendations

The Task and Finish group have identified a number of recommendations as detailed below –

The Task and Finish group agreed that a detailed protocol be put into place to offer guidance and support when incidents of bullying and harassment occur
The group ratified the protocol and accompanying flowchart attached at Appendices A and B and recommended that these documents together with related guidance be approved and published on the Member Gateway.
The agreed protocol and flowchart is now live on the Member Gateway - https://shropshirecouncil.sharepoint.com/sites/CH/mw – it is recommended that this approach is endorsed and is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that learning is captured and it remains relevant and appropriate.

The Task and Finish group recommend that the Personal Safety Guide at Appendix C be included in the appropriate section on the Member Gateway
The advice within this document should be made available for reference and awareness for all Members, providing hints and tips relating to both personal and online safety, mindful that this is not an exhaustive list of measures, but a useful prompt and guide.
The Personal Safety Guide is now live on the Member Gateway - https://shropshirecouncil.sharepoint.com/sites/CH/mw – it is recommended that this approach is endorsed and is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that learning is captured and it remains relevant and appropriate.

The Task and Finish group recommend that any incidents are reported and tracked by the appropriate person using the Incident Form on the ERP
The group recognise the importance of logging and tracking incidents as they occur in order to flag patterns of behaviour and identify potential concerns.

The Task and Finish group recommended that Member safety should referenced as part of the Member induction programme.
Induction training should include information on social media awareness, and reference to personal safety, highlighting the guidance and protocols in place.

The Task and Finish Group recognised the value of the continued relationship with the Force Elected Official Advisor for West Mercia
Members recommended that this is maintained as Operation Ford is developed further.

Member Harassment, Abuse and Intimidation Protocol

Overarching principle of this protocol

Whenever there is a threat to a Member (or officer), priority should be given to working together across Council services to assess the risk and provide a proportionate response.

Context and purpose

This protocol refers to any form of harassment, abuse or intimidation. This includes verbal abuse; physical attacks; sexual harassment; being stalked followed or loitered around; threats of harm; distribution of misinformation; character assassination; inappropriate emails, letters, phone calls and communications on social media. (Based on the LGA Definition of harassment, abuse and intimidation).

This is not an exhaustive list, but is meant to assist Members, Officers and others who might need to implement this protocol to ensure a common understanding across the Council.

It is recognised that people will have different levels of acceptance or tolerance of behaviours and so a proportionate response is required as informed by an understanding of the perspective of the member at risk of harm. In order for this protocol to achieve its purpose Council officers, the Police, and any other partners who may be involved must have an understanding of the environment that local politicians are operating in. The Council, through the Service Director for Legal and Governance, work with the appointed Force Elected Official Advisor for West Mercia police to develop a joint understanding of potential and existing risks, and suitable options and opportunities to manage risks to personal safety.

The Force Elected Official Advisor is a new role, present in all British Police Forces, to bolster Operation Bridger (which is focused on the risk to and safety of MPs). The Force Elected Official Advisor has a wider remit across more democratic roles including Councillors.

As with the Council's staff, no elected member should feel they are being bullied or harassed or otherwise harmed in the course of undertaking their role on behalf of the Council.

Whilst this protocol is mainly focused on incidents affecting Members involving those outside of the Council, it can also be applied to internal incidents. Members should feel encouraged and sufficiently supported to speak out should they witness any incidents of bullying or intimidation. **It is important to remember that should a person receive abuse or have any concerns regarding personal safety, they should report this to the police as a matter of priority using the website - Home | West Mercia Police or 111.** The police have access to wider information and intelligence which they will use to understand more about the situation and individuals involved

APPENDIX A

and establish what action they would take or would advise the member to take. **If a person feels at immediate risk they should call 999.**

This protocol sets out what will happen in and through the Council should such a situation occur.

The Protocol

All incidents must be reported in accordance with the flowchart attached at appendix 1, when they occur, whether by a Member, or by the officer who has received the threat to the Member. Failure to report all incidents in a timely manner may mean that levels of risk are not managed as effectively as they could be by the Member, their political party, the Council and the Police. This includes helping to identify patterns of behaviour by individuals, issues and locations relating to or mentioned in the incident or being the place the incident occurred.

Notifying the Member involved

Where a Member is not aware of the incident i.e. the threat to a Member is made indirectly e.g. in writing via the council or verbally to an officer, the incident will be escalated by the officer receiving or witnessing the threat or incident to the Appropriate Person (the Service Director Legal and Governance, the Head of Legal and Democratic, The Team Leader Committee Services, or the Members' Assistant).

The Member will be contacted and informed that the Appropriate Officer has received the report. This must be done in writing and verbally. The scale of the threat and risk should inform whether repeated efforts to speak with the Member and/or Group Leader should be made.

Making decisions about Member personal safety

It is the responsibility of the Member to make decisions about their personal safety when carrying out activity in their roles as a representative of the Council. Officers of the council can provide advice and suggest options and approaches, and where appropriate will review issues such as security in council owned buildings, that are in line with this advice.

It is the responsibility of political parties to ensure the safety of their candidates when they are campaigning.

As part of assisting the Member to make decisions about their personal safety, they will be able to request to view any available relevant information and video still images or photographs of the person making the threats. This must be done in line with data protection legislation, and where necessary will be advised by the Council's Data Protection Officer.

Any immediate concerns must be reported to the police as a matter of priority.

APPENDIX A

Recording of incidents

Recording the incident should start when the Member involved or the officer witnessing the incident or receiving the threat, at or as soon as it occurs. The recording of the incident and any subsequent actions must be completed in line with the requirements set out in this protocol.

Recording the incident should be carried out using the current form the ERP.

Reporting and using the information from reported incidents

Reporting from the incident system will provide access to up-to-date information on incidents involving members. Due to the nature of this wider collated and analysed information it will be available to a specified group of officers, and on request to the group leaders.

> Please contact the following people with this email heading to report this incident *"Alert – Member Safety Incident – Alert".*
>
> Contact details for the appropriate person:
>
> - Service Director Legal and Governance – tim.collard@shropshire.gov.uk
> - Head of Legal and Democratic – miranda.garrard@shropshire.gov.uk
> - The Team Leader Committee Services – amanda.holyoak@shropshire.gov.uk
> - Members' Assistant – george.battson@shropshire.gov.uk

Relationship with the Police

The Police have appointed a Force Elected Official Advisor for West Mercia who is a key partner in relation to this protocol and has the role and powers to assess and act where there are suspected risks and threats to a person, or where the situation has occurred. This is no different to day-to-day life for every member of the public.

The Senior Officer for this protocol, normally the Service Director – Legal and Governance, will ensure that there are clear arrangements with the Police Force Elected Official Advisor for West Mercia on how these matters will be handled, including when the Police will be notified of an incident, what information the Police must be provided with, the response that the Police would able to make, and how the Police will work with the member and the Council, keeping them informed about developments and any action that is taken.

The Police Force Elected Official Advisor for West Mercia may also offer advice to the Member, and Members more widely, on how they can continue to be aware of their personal safety. Specific security briefings are generally provided for election candidates.

APPENDIX A

Ongoing risk assessment, action plan and review

The frequency and scope of ongoing assessments of risk, and the application and review of any action plan and the situation will take place on a case-by-case basis. The Member will have a key role in this, liaising with council officers through the Appropriate Officer, and with the Police where their involvement is required.

Support for Members

Members will be able to be signposted to where they can access any mental health and wellbeing support as required. Group Leaders can make a referral to Occupational Health for additional support. Suitable support i.e. counselling, will be made available to both those Members who are victims of bullying and harassment, as well as any members who may be accused of bullying and harassment behaviour.

Review and learning

Learning and Evaluation from incidents will be essential to ensuring that this protocol remains relevant and effective, including what steps can be taken to mitigate future risk. This protocol and its implementation should be reviewed every 12 months by the lead officer to ensure that it is up to date and takes account of new and emerging risks and opportunities to strengthen the personal safety of Members.

This protocol will be shared with newly elected Members as part of their induction and will be easily accessible to all on the Member Gateway. Ensuring that Members are aware of the support available to them and how to access this information.
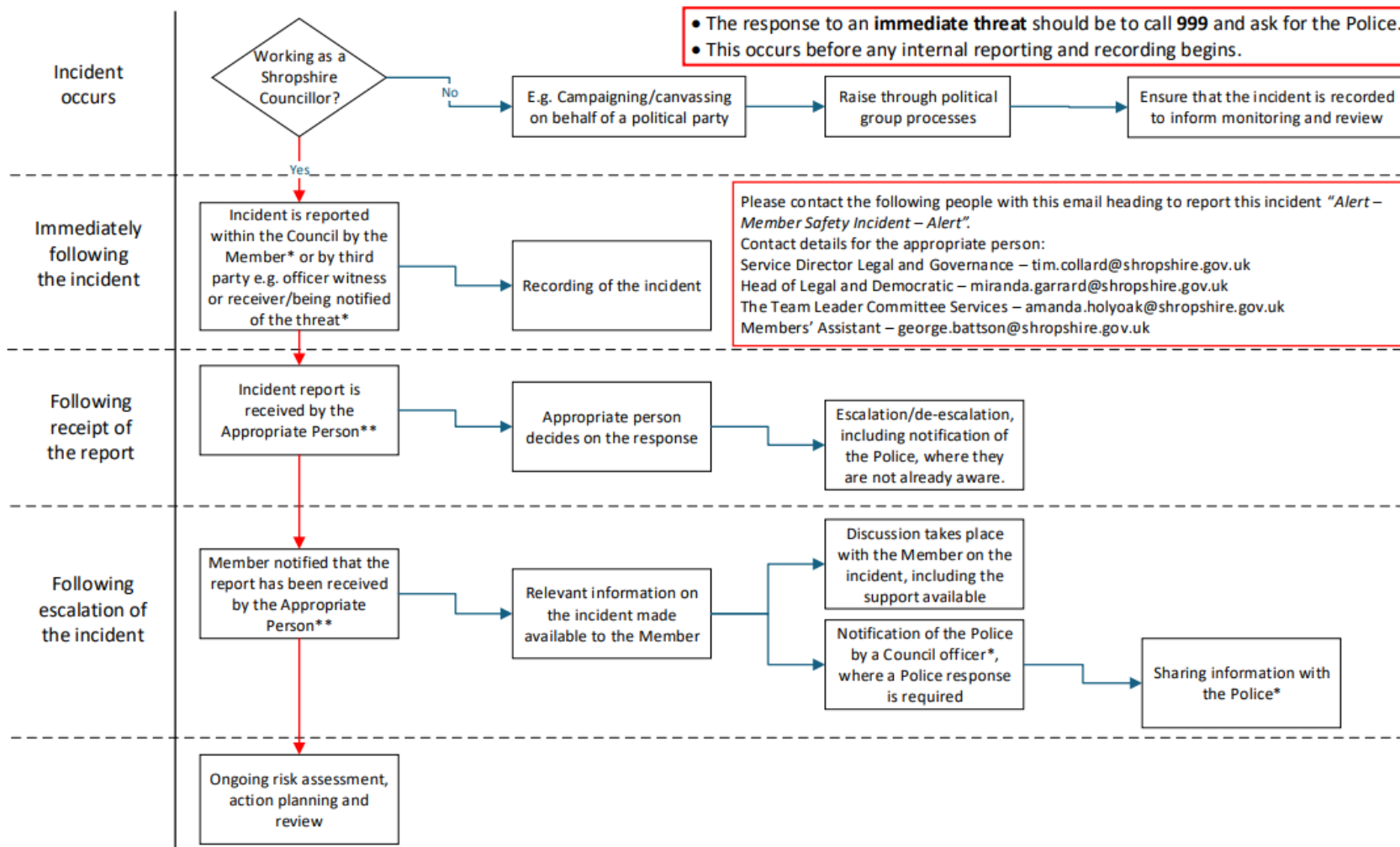
Version 1.0

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APPENDIX B

Member Harassment, Abuse and Intimidation Protocol – What the council will do in an incident that may result in harm
[*Whenever there is a threat to a Member (or officer), priority should be given to working together across Council services to assess the risk and provide a proportionate response.*]

- The response to an **immediate threat** should be to call **999** and ask for the Police.
- This occurs before any internal reporting and recording begins.

Incident occurs

Working as a Shropshire Councillor? — No → E.g. Campaigning/canvassing on behalf of a political party → Raise through political group processes → Ensure that the incident is recorded to inform monitoring and review

Yes ↓

Immediately following the incident

Incident is reported within the Council by the Member* or by third party e.g. officer witness or receiver/being notified of the threat* → Recording of the incident

Please contact the following people with this email heading to report this incident *"Alert – Member Safety Incident – Alert".*
Contact details for the appropriate person:
Service Director Legal and Governance – tim.collard@shropshire.gov.uk
Head of Legal and Democratic – miranda.garrard@shropshire.gov.uk
The Team Leader Committee Services – amanda.holyoak@shropshire.gov.uk
Members' Assistant – george.battson@shropshire.gov.uk

Following receipt of the report

Incident report is received by the Appropriate Person** → Appropriate person decides on the response → Escalation/de-escalation, including notification of the Police, where they are not already aware.

Following escalation of the incident

Member notified that the report has been received by the Appropriate Person** → Relevant information on the incident made available to the Member →
- Discussion takes place with the Member on the incident, including the support available
- Notification of the Police by a Council officer*, where a Police response is required → Sharing information with the Police*

Ongoing risk assessment, action planning and review

*The nature and severity of the incident may necessitate/result in the Police being the first point of reporting. It will also inform the pace of response. Within the Council process this is driven the risk assessment of the appropriate person/senior officer. However, the incident should still be reported, recorded and taken account of by the Council.
**Appropriate Person means the Service Director Legal and Governance, the Head of Legal and Democratic, The Team Leader Committee Services, or the Members' Assistant.

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APPENDIX C

Member Bullying and Harassment – things to consider for your own safety

Context

Keeping safe at work whether it is within communities, in council offices or online, and whilst campaigning, are important to consider, and mindfulness around personal safety and security is key to this. Whilst this is not designed to cause alarm and many Members will not experience any issues of concern during their time in office, it is important to be aware of what precautions could be taken to both prevent and mitigate any incidents that might occur.

Whilst it is not possible to completely remove the risk of incidents of harassment, abuse and intimidation, there are actions that Members can take steps to help reduce it from occurring.

Member Code of Conduct

Members should be mindful of the Member Code of Conduct, [Member Code of Conduct Training](#).

Members can set the tone of public debate and the environment which people see them working in. This can help show the public how Members treat and respect one another and others, demonstrating how they should be communicated with. This is particularly relevant because all Council and committee meetings that are held in public are live streamed and recorded and are therefore accessible to a wider audience over a longer period of time.

What Members can do to help prevent harassment, abuse and intimidation, including risks to their personal safety –

Awareness of potential issues and making informed decisions early can help to reduce risks, similarly, conducting risk assessments both prior to and during activities can highlight possible concerns.

Consideration of personal safety checks should be incorporated into daily activities such as –

- Ensure that relevant people are aware e.g. members of your group, and friends or family are aware of where you are going and for how long? Share details of address, date and time of visit and expected duration. Also, ensuring that they know how to contact you.
- Arrange meetings in a public place wherever possible.
- Park in well lit, well populated areas.
- Team up with another Elected Member, if possible, when making visits.

- Ensure that your mobile phone is with you, easily accessible with a fully charged battery.
- Consider having a colleague, friend or family member on speed dial for ease of access in emergency situations. For instance, there is an emergency SOS personal safety tool in most mobiles which could be called without needing to unlock it.
- Consider activating live trackers/tacking app functionality on your phone e.g. WhatsApp tracker, Strava, GPS etc. These can often operate in areas with low/reduce digital connectivity such as some rural locations in Shropshire.
- Carry a working personal safety alarm at all times.
- In cases where you may feel threatened or at risk try to remain calm, make excuses, and leave the meeting.
- Keep personal details such as home addresses private, ensure privacy settings are applied to social media pages, and be mindful of what information is in the public domain. Please note that an Elected Member's home address and other details will be included in documents that are published when they take up their role, i.e. their register of interests. Member can apply to the Monitoring Officer for such details to be redacted because the disclosure of this information could mean the Member was at risk of being harmed.
- Set out a clear message on your social media platforms regarding acceptable online behaviour, being prepared to reinforce this if needed.
- Consider online content before posting and the expected responses as well as how you will deal with them. Know when to step back to avoid conflict escalation.

These points are not exhaustive however they reinforce some of the ways in which Members can help to safeguard themselves. The following link also provides greater guidance particularly aimed towards Councillors who may face intimidation and how to handle this. These have been drawn from a range of different sources such as the LGA, and other local authorities.

Some useful links:

[Full word English version guide for councillors on handling intimidation_FINAL.pdf (local.gov.uk)](local.gov.uk)

[LGA – Practical Guide for Councillors on improving digital citizenship]

[LGA – Social Media Guide for Councillors]

[Member Wellbeing Offer_March 2022.pdf]

An option shared by the LGA on rules of engagement that can be included on your social media/online pages that sets out how you intend to engage with

APPENDIX C

people online.

Rules of engagement

Welcome to my page, which aims to communicate my activities as a councillor.

If you wish to be a part of this online community, you must agree to abide by this code of digital engagement, which is designed to keep everyone safe.

RULE 1
Debate and disagreement are welcome on this page, but only if expressed with courtesy, respect and politeness.

RULE 2
Posts should not contain abuse, harassment, intimidation or threats of any form.

RULE 3
Posts should not contain any form of discrimination – including racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia or religious intolerance.

RULE 4
Posts should not spread false or unverified information.

RULE 5
For transparency reasons, users should not post anonymously.

If any of these rules are broken, page admins reserve the right to delete posts, block users and report content to the police if necessary.

It may not be possible to respond to all queries on this page due to time constraints - if you have specific enquiries or casework, please send directly to my official email.

For more information on the LGA's work on handling abuse on social media and digital citizenship visit: **www.local.gov.uk/civility-public-life**

Local Government Association   CWLC-WLGA   nilga   COSLA

REF 43.4