



Date of meeting:	16 March 2023
Subject	Support for Councillors and Councillor Safety
Recommendation	The Democratic Services Committee is asked to accept the report for information.
Contact Officer:	Vera Jones, Democratic and Language Services Manager Catrin Love, Assistant Head of Corporate Support Cara Williams, Members' Training Officer

What is the background and relevant considerations?

1. In the period since the Local Government Election in May 2022, two main themes have continuously become apparent.
 - There are increasing pressures on Councillors and, therefore, the need to ensure **health and well-being support** for you.
 - In addition, **Councillor safety** matters have become apparent in light of national incidents, incidents within the Council and to individual Councillors.
2. There may also be a link between both elements - the harassment suffered by some Members can increase stress. Also, many have reported that work pressures and the strain of living costs are affecting society, and more people are asking their local Councillor for help.
3. However, many also feel that society has changed and the expectations on Councillors have increased as people's expectations are generally higher.
4. Due to recent conversations with a few Councillors, it has become apparent that people are unaware of the support already available to help you to look after your health and well-being. This includes your physical and mental health.
5. The 'Looking after yourself' page on the Members' Intranet refers to some of the support available.
Mental Health.
6. One of the key services available for you is the Medra counselling service. The Service is confidential, and you can self-refer to the service - details on how to do this are on the intranet site.
7. However, we also try to encourage Mental Health and, to this end, we offer a large number of training sessions in the field. At the beginning of January, a two-day 'Mental Health First Aid' session was held and very



positive feedback was received. Further sessions are currently being arranged.

Safety - training

8. As noted, the violence and harassment suffered by some Members increases stress on them and the Safe Leadership course has been adapted to address this. It includes discussion and practical steps regarding personal safety in order to keep you safe and to reduce personal stress. You will see from another report that the numbers who have been registering for the events have been quite low, but the feedback we have received from the sessions has been extremely positive. A further reminder has been sent to all Members who have yet to register on the course encouraging them to attend. For those Members who have attended the course some time ago, previous to the new element on personal safety being included, a short session is available on this element alone.
9. In addition, webinar sessions have been arranged by the Local Government Association in England (LGA) in December 2022 and February 2023. The webinar titles were as follows “Handling On-line Abuse and Intimidation webinar” and “Councillor Personal Safety Webinar”. All Councillors were contacted offering them a chance to attend the free sessions virtually. The provision had not been specifically tailored for Wales but a number of very suitable matters for Councillors to help with safety were part of the sessions.

Safety - practical matters

10. The Council has also adapted practical arrangements in the Chambers following an incident at an Extraordinary Meeting of the Council on 24/08/22. There was disruption from the public gallery during the meeting. Following the incident, many Councillors and staff reported that they did not feel safe in the Chamber. By now, a risk assessment is undertaken for each multi-location meeting held (Chamber and remote location).
11. In light of the risk assessments, some specific steps have been taken to improve safety:
 - ensure lockers for the public to store their bags as they go up to the public gallery,
 - plenty of posters in the public gallery noting what members of the public are permitted to do (and what is not acceptable),
 - a rope to separate the public gallery from the Chamber floor (but access must be permitted to individuals for planning committees or to ask a question at the Full Council meeting).
 - Management arrangements to hold a recess if there is a disturbance
 - Briefing Chairpersons
 - Consider employing a security firm if the risk level is considered high
12. Every risk assessment will consider the matters on the agenda before reaching a conclusion if further security measures are required. Measures



may vary such as moving location (from Siambr Hywel Dda to Siambr Dafydd Orwig), briefing the Chairperson on the steps to be taken, ensuring appropriate safety on the site, or in specific cases holding the meeting virtually. Further work will be undertaken during the coming months to look further on the design of the Chambers and the physical safety measures in place.

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

Physical Health

14. One additional element is physical health and there is useful information once again on the Members' Intranet, which includes tips on how to properly set up your workspace at home, and the access available to the physiotherapy service.

Communication

15. It appears that we have not been communicating this information to Councillors explicitly and often enough. Recently, we have shared information via the weekly Bulletin that is sent to you as Councillors. Also remember to have a look at the Members' Intranet for information, or to ask relevant officers - information about training from Cara Williams, information about the contents of the Members' Intranet from the Democracy team and the Political Group Assistants.
16. As representatives of all Members on the committee, you are also asked to share this information with your fellow members to ensure that we all take responsibility of looking after ourselves and each other.

Recommendation

17. The Democratic Services Committee is asked to accept the report for information.