REPORT TO:	Members' Learning and Development Panel
	Ethics Committee
	12 October 2021
SUBJECT:	Members' Development Plans Update
LEAD OFFICER:	Asmat Hussain, Executive Director of Resources and Monitoring Officer (Interim)

BRIEF FOR THE PANEL:

The Panel is asked to:

1. Note that this report will also be received by Ethics Committee on 30 September 2021;

2. Note progress in developing a detailed Member Training Programme (Appendix 1);

3. Promote attendance within their Groups engagement with the activities listed in the Member Training Programme;

4. Note the intention to report attendance at Member Training activities to Ethics Committee and to add training records to Members' individual records on Mod.Gov, to appear on the website;

5. Consider and comment on the draft Member role descriptions at Appendix 2;

6. Consider any additions or amendments to the Members Handbook which would be helpful for current and/or new Members;

7. Consider and comment on the draft Member Safety guidance at Appendix 4;

8. Consider and comment on the draft Member Social Media guidance at Appendix 5.

1. MEMBER TRAINING PROGRAMME 2021-22

1.1 Appendix 1 attached to this cover report lists training completed to date and planned for 2021-22.

1.2 The design of the programme has been informed by:
- The Report in the Public Interest
- The Scrutiny Improvement Review
- Comments of the Member Development Panel at its meeting on 13 July 2021.

1.3 There is additionally support to Cabinet Members, for example mentoring by councillor peers with relevant expertise elsewhere in the country, facilitated by

the Local Government Association (LGA) and attendance at LGA leadership development courses.

1.4 Work to confirm dates for each activity is ongoing. Sessions targeted to all Members will be offered twice, at lunchtime and evening.

1.5 Development sessions will not usually be recorded to be viewed by those unable to attend on the day because:
- Councillors are encouraged to attend in person to gain maximum benefit
- Development sessions are safe spaces for participants to ask questions and develop their understanding and are not suitable for wider dissemination.

Occasionally it may be appropriate to record and disseminate a factual briefing.

1.6 Members can also access development opportunities through:
- The Learning Pool on the Intranet, including access to Local Government Association (LGA) workbooks and e-learning designed for Councillors
- Attending free events provided by the LGA and others: details of events relevant to Councillors will be circulated by the Democratic Services team as they are identified

1.7 Chairs, Vice Chairs and Cabinet Members are also encouraged to attend events which will enable them to develop their own networks of peers in other councils to share experience and good practice.

1.8 It is proposed to prepare an annual report detailing attendance at Member Training activities for consideration by the Panel and then by Ethics Committee. The facility within Mod.gov to record individual Members' training attendance for publication on the website will also be utilised.

2. **MEMBER ROLE DESCRIPTIONS**

2.1 Member role descriptions have been drafted for consideration by the Panel and appear at Appendix 2. The drafts have been informed by:
- Examples from other councils
- Training by the Local Government Association on being an effective Cabinet Member.

2.2 Subject to the views of the Panel, it is intended to:
- Incorporate the role descriptions in the Member Handbook (see below)
- Use the descriptions as the focus for a session in the Member Induction programme in May 2022.

3. MEMBERS' HANDBOOK

3.1 The Members' Handbook is an essential tool for Members, incorporating key practical information and guidance to support Members in their day to day work. The current contents list of the Handbook appears at Appendix 3.

3.2 It is proposed to update the Members' Handbook immediately to include:
- Link to the Local Government Association Councillors' Guide
- Member safety guidance (see 4 below)
- Social media guidance (see 5 below)
- Reference to the updated guidance on the Code of Conduct (to be considered by Ethics Committee on 30 September)
- Guidance arising from the new Access to Information Protocol, demonstrating the different kinds of information accessible to different kinds of members
- Member role descriptions (subject to the views of the Panel)

3.3 The Panel is asked to advise on any other information which it would be helpful to include in the Handbook for Members from May 2022.

4. MEMBERS' SAFETY GUIDANCE

4.1 Member safety guidance has been drafted, drawing heavily on guidance produced by the Local Government Association (LGA) on personal safety and handling intimidation. The draft includes local contacts for further advice and appears at Appendix 4.

4.2 The Panel is asked to comment on the draft guidance. Subject to the views of the Panel, it is proposed to:
- Publish the guidance in the Members' Handbook and share with all Members
- Offer briefing sessions for each Group to enable questions to be raised and answered.

5. MEMBERS' SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE

5.1 In May 2021 Ethics Committee considered draft social media guidance for Councillors: they asked that it be simplified and made more concise. A revised draft appears at Appendix 5, using guidance produced by the LGA: the opportunity has been taken to move some content into the Members' Safety Guidance so that the Social Media guidance now focuses on other relevant considerations.

5.2 The Panel is asked to comment on the draft guidance. Subject to the views of the Panel, it is proposed to:
- Publish the guidance in the Members' Handbook and share with all Members

- Schedule training sessions for Members, led by the LGA.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There is a budget of £21,000 set aside for Member training. It is expected that the majority, if not all of the training listed in the programme at Appendix 1 can be delivered at no cost to the Council, through the support of the Local Government Association.

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APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

1:   Member training plan 2021/22

2:   Draft Member role descriptions

3:   Members' Handbook contents list

4:   Members' safety guidance

5:   Members' social media guidance

Appendix 1 – Member training plan 2021/22

This programme is supplemented by:

a) the ongoing offer of coaching/ mentoring for:
    - All Cabinet members
    - All Chairs of Committees

b) attendance at conferences and externally-provided member development sessions (eg those delivered free by the LGA for Cabinet Members/ Committee chairs)

c) Member access to workbooks and e-learning via Croydon Learning Pool.

Items in italics have already been delivered.

Date	Topic/ content	Audience	Delivery method	Delivered by
May	*Planning Committee refresher*	*Planning Committee*	*Briefing*	*Browne Jacobson*
June	*Induction – Code of conduct; Councillor/ Officer Protocol; constitution*	*New members*	*Briefing*	*Monitoring Officer/ Head of Democratic Services & Scrutiny*
June	*Adult social care budget*	*H&SC Scrutiny*	*Briefing*	*Executive Director of Health and Wellbeing*
May	*Planning Committee refresher*	*Planning Committee*	*Briefing*	*Browne Jacobson*
August	*Scrutiny – revised approach in response to scrutiny improvement review*	*Scrutiny Chairs*	*Briefing*	*Centre for Governance and Scrutiny*
September	*Introduction to local government finance*	*All members*	*Workbook*	*Local Government Association*
September	*Annual refresher training*	*Licensing Committee*	*Training session*	
29 September	Fundamentals of scrutiny: - Scrutiny's legal powers - New approach to scrutiny	All scrutiny members	Interactive development session	*Centre for Governance and Scrutiny*

Date	Topic/ content	Audience	Delivery method	Delivered by
4 October	Member Code of Conduct	All members	Briefing	Local Government Association/ Head of Democratic Services and Scrutiny/ Head of Law and Governance& Deputy Monitoring Officer (Interim)
5 October	Budget scrutiny development/ planning session #1: • Principles and practice of good financial scrutiny • Understanding financial overview and context • Understanding financial performance	SOC and sub-committee chairs/ vice chairs	Interactive development session	Centre for Governance and Scrutiny/ Local Government Association
Mid October	Member safety – new guidance	All members	Briefing offered to both Groups	Local Government Association/ Head of Security
13 October	Introduction to finance in Croydon: • Councillors' roles and responsibilities, including monitoring, audit and scrutiny • Overview of Croydon's budgets	All members	Briefing, Q&A following use of workbook	Local Government Association
25 October	If required: Referendum outcome: what happens next?	All members	Briefing, Q&A	Monitoring Officer
26 October	Budget scrutiny development/ planning session #2 for Scrutiny and Overview Committee members: • Testing the robustness of the budget • Principles of transformation funding • HRA and capital programme • Financial scrutiny principles: budget scrutiny	SOC and sub-committee chairs/ vice chairs	Interactive development session	Centre for Governance and Scrutiny/ Local Government Association
Mid November	2022/23 budget – • Timescales for decision making	SOC and scrutiny sub-	Briefing, Q&A	Executive Director of Finance, Investment and Risk

Date	Topic/ content	Audience	Delivery method	Delivered by
	• Overview of budget gap and principles	committee members		
November	Ensuring effective assurance: the role of General Purposes and Audit Committee: • Role and responsibility • Understanding controls • Risk management • Appropriate challenge and escalation (To be discussed with Independent Chair)	GPAC	Interactive development session	Local Government Association
November	Scrutiny of the Renewal Plan: how scrutiny of delivery works in detail	All scrutiny members	Interactive development session	Centre for Governance and Scrutiny
December	Financial oversight and risk: understanding the respective roles of scrutiny and audit	SOC GPAC	Interactive development session	Centre for Governance and Scrutiny/ Local Government Association
December	Member/ officer roles and responsibilities (including member role descriptions)	All members	Interactive development sessions	Local Government Association
January	Member enquiries system/ Access to information protocol	All members	Briefing/ Q&A session	TBC
January	Scrutiny and information: • Different types and how to interpret them • Access to information protocol	All scrutiny members	Interactive development session	Centre for Governance and Scrutiny
February	Housing applications and policy	All members	Briefing	Director of Housing – Resident Engagement & Allocations
February	Financial leadership: reflections on practice in 2021/22, action planning for the future	Cabinet	Interactive development session	Local Government Association
March	Duties of members as corporate parents	All members	Briefing	Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care

Further training to be scheduled:
- 2 x Chairing training sessions (to be delivered by Association of Democratic Services Officers)
- Using social media effectively and safely – for all Members
- Planning Committee (to be delivered by Planning Advisory Service)
- Whistleblowing policy/ procedure briefing (once Policy revised and officer training completed)
- Commissioning/ procurement (to follow budget setting process)

For delivery May 2022 onwards:
- Engagement and consultation

Councillor role descriptions

These role descriptions set out the skills, behaviours and knowledge required for different Councillor roles.

The purpose of the role description is:
- To provide clarity for Councillors, officers and the public about what is expected of each role
- To support Councillors in their development by providing a basis to identify any development needs, both for this role and for future roles to support succession planning. The role description informs the Member Development Programme.

Ward Councillor

The Ward Councillor role profile underpins and is a requirement for, all other Councillor roles.

ACCOUNTABILITIES

Leadership at Ward and Borough Level
- Individually and collectively lead and champion the interests of local communities and effectively represent the interests of the ward and its constituents, to deliver outcomes that make a difference
- Be the main point of contact for the Council with local communities, which includes residents as well as businesses and other organisations based in the borough
- Engage with local people and businesses, particularly those in under-represented groups, and ensure their views are heard by the Council
- Develop a deep understanding of local communities, their issues, needs and concerns so that these can be fully represented
- Promote good community relations and strengthen community cohesion through taking and encouraging steps to eliminate unlawful discriminatory practices and attitudes within and outside the Council
- Support others to empower themselves and find ways to strengthen the capacity of communities to take action on their own behalf to tackle things that are important to them
- Act as ambassador and advocate for the Council as a whole
- Meet face to face and liaise regularly with local interested individuals and groups to listen and support their involvement in key Council decisions
- Undertake case work for constituents and act as an advocate in resolving concerns or grievances, in a timely way
- Ensure that constituents receive feedback on consultations in which they have participated and help them to understand the reasons why the Council has made its decisions
- When participating in decision-making, ensure that decisions are lawful, reasonable, proportionate, contribute to the delivery of the corporate plan and are within the Council's policy and budget framework
- Participate constructively in the good governance of the ward and borough, being an effective member of any Committee or panel appointed to
- Use influence as a Councillor to develop links between groups and communities in the ward and local area
- Work with communities to help with local service delivery, including encouraging volunteers.

Representation

- Inform the debate at full council meetings and contribute to the effectiveness of the council meeting
- Contribute to the formation of the council's policies, budget, strategies and service delivery, and to the scrutiny of their implementation and review
- Develop and maintain knowledge of how the Council works, its objectives and developing working relationships with its officers as appropriate and relevant to casework
- Keep constituents informed about what they have been doing, through relevant and appropriate communication channels
- Represent the Council to communities, and the communities to the Council
- Participate in the activities of any political group of which the Councillor is a member
- Represent the Council on outside bodies, as appointed, and, where appropriate, represent those bodies within the Council.

Other duties
- Fulfil the legal and local requirements placed on a Councillor (in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct and Councillor/ Officer Working Protocol)
- Take responsibility for ongoing personal development and continuous improvement for any role undertaken
- Behave in a professional manner towards residents and other stakeholders, officers, and other Councillors.

BEHAVIOURS

Councillors maintain the highest standards of personal conduct, consistent with the Nolan Principles and the Member Code of Conduct.

Our values are fundamental to everything we do as a local authority. Councillors demonstrate commitment to the Council's corporate values through these behaviours:

One Team
- Collaborates effectively with others to benefit the whole Council
- Develops effective relationships with key council officers as appropriate and representatives from partner agencies
- Constructively challenges others when necessary to ensure values and standards are maintained.

Proud to serve
- Strives to do the best for the local community, getting the most from limited resources and using taxpayers' money wisely

- Builds effective, strong and empathetic relationships with communities, working across political boundaries without compromising political values, maintaining confidences where appropriate or required, demonstrating empathy.
- Understands different experiences and sees a range of viewpoints
- Demonstrates effective community engagement skills – specifically:
  - two-way communication with residents to listen and understand
  - finding ways to enable and create opportunities for residents to be actively involved in decision-making
  - listening to every voice (not just the loudest ones) – understanding the role of officers and knowing when to seek help and advice
- Responds fairly to everyone's requests, and where necessary explains when requests can't be met
- Processes information, develops priorities and focuses on what is important
- Manages the media within the context of protocols but identifies when additional support from specialists is required.

Honest and open
- Performs role with integrity, fairness, honesty and transparency
- Adapts style to communicate effectively with a range of audiences, including stakeholders, delivers effective presentations and public speaking and presents reasoned arguments
- Actively listens and effectively questions
- Is able to manage own emotions in the face of conflict or challenge
- Is aware of own strengths and limitations and is open to feedback
- Understands and analyses complex information and presents clear and meaningful arguments.

Taking responsibility
- Gets things done and delivers on promises
- Only commits to actions that they, (or, if appropriate, others), will deliver
- Manages casework effectively ensuring residents receive prompt, respectful and responsive service
- Uses IT to access agendas, minutes, reports, the Council's Intranet and website and carry out role
- Is up to date and well-informed, reading, digesting and managing information as appropriate.

Valuing diversity
- Makes the most of the many perspectives that make Croydon distinctive
- Listens across communities, ensuring decisions are informed by an understanding of the full range of views
- Focuses effort on identifying underlying needs and looking for ways in which these can be met effectively

- Leads and champions the interests of local communities
- Treats others with equal value and respect.

SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

- Able to manage casework, including the use of IT to support the process
- Basic administration skills
- Understanding of how the Council works, including the political decision-making structures of the Council and partners
- Knowledge of the Council structure, key officer contacts, service procedures and eligibility criteria (in relation to schemes and services administered by the Council)
- Understanding of the role of a Councillor and the role of officers – how these roles differ and how they work together
- Able to engage and work with a wide range of people and as part of a team
- Understanding of and commitment to the Members' Code of Conduct
- Knowledge of the strategic priorities and key policies of the Council
- Basic understanding local government finance and audit processes
- Able to understand and interpret council budgets and accounts
- Understanding of the Corporate Parenting responsibilities of Councillors
- Knowledge of the Council's standards of customer care and complaints procedure
- Conflict resolution and mediation skills
- Able to chair meetings in the community, facilitating open discussion and debate
- Knowledge of the issues within the ward and the wider locality
- Understands national policies and their impact on the ward
- Knowledge of partner agencies operating in the ward
- Keeps up to date with recent and ongoing evaluations of the Council

Scrutiny Councillor

The Scrutiny Councillor role profile underpins, and is a requirement for, the Scrutiny Committee Chair.

ACCOUNTABILITIES

- With other Scrutiny and Overview Members, effectively and efficiently discharge the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Function under s21 of the Local Government Act 2000
- Participate in the development of a prioritised, balanced scrutiny work programme which is focused on outcomes for local people and the Council
- Work effectively and efficiently with limited resources, prioritising scrutiny activity and use of officer capacity
- Use a range of techniques to ensure that scrutiny hears from and understands issues and ideas which are important to local people
- Use understanding of the needs of local people to shape scrutiny discussions, without acting in a party political manner
- Develop constructive relationships with the Cabinet and individual portfolio holders as well as senior officers
- Participate in an annual review of scrutiny's performance and delivery of its work programme, monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of scrutiny activity

BEHAVIOURS

Commitment to making the scrutiny function work and to developing the conditions necessary for working effectively with others in the council and any relevant partner organisations, including positive working relationships

SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

- Understanding of law, guidance and principles relating to effective scrutiny
- Skills in analysis of performance, finance and risk information, assimilating and analysing complex information
- Able to make recommendations based on evidence
- Able to work as part of a Committee to contribute to the continuous improvement of the Council
- Excellent listening and questioning skills, able to challenge constructively, engage with and learn from the public
- Able to be agile and to adapt personal style and the working of the Committee to obtain input from all relevant partners and the community
- Effective research skills
- Monitoring and evaluation skills

Chair of Scrutiny and Overview Committee/ Chair of Sub-Committee

ACCOUNTABILITIES

- Maintain effective liaison with the Leader of the Council, Cabinet Members, the Chief Executive and Executive Directors to ensure that scrutiny contributes to effective decision-making in Croydon
- Represent scrutiny in Full Council and be accountable to Council for the actions of Scrutiny and Overview Committee
- Ensure that scrutiny is publicised and communicated to build understanding of its role both within and outside the Council
- Be responsible for the constitutional arrangements relating to the waiving of Call-In where decisions are urgent and cannot be reasonably deferred
- Ensure that scrutiny work is properly coordinated and prioritised, taking into account available resources
- Maintain an overview of scrutiny in Croydon and learn from practice elsewhere
- Ensure the continuing development of overview and scrutiny in Croydon through improving both practice and how it is organised
- Contribute to the recruitment and retention of co-optees
- Encourage the involvement of all interested parties, stakeholders, individuals, voluntary and community groups in scrutiny and overview matters.

SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE
- Ambassadorial skills, to be able to represent and champion the scrutiny function within and outside the Council
- Relationship building skills with other parts of the political management structure
- Advanced listening and questioning skills

<u>Committee Chair</u>

The Committee Chair role profile underpins and is also a requirement for, the Scrutiny Committee Chair/ Sub-Committee Chair.

ACCOUNTABILITIES

- Provide leadership and direction through the effective chairing of Committee meetings in line with the Constitution, terms of reference and Code of Conduct
- Identify the priorities for the work of the Committee and ensure that there is a manageable and achievable agenda for each meeting
- Foster and maintain a disciplined approach by the Members involved having regard to high standards of behaviour and ethics, including relevant protocols
- Ensure that all Members appointed to the Committee fully understand the Committee's work and receive relevant training as specified by the Council
- Encourage all members of the Committee to engage in its activities
- Represent the Council at formal and informal meetings
- Ensure that meetings are run effectively and inclusively, in line with any agreed agenda, to deal with the business at hand and keeping to time.

BEHAVIOURS

- Prepares effectively for meetings, including consultation with officers, other councillors, constituents, partners and/or other stakeholders as appropriate in advance
- Allows all Members to participate and be heard, ensuring that focused and balanced discussions are held within an appropriate framework for debate and managing any conflict appropriately
- Ensures that resources are used to best effect
- Impartiality and objectivity
- Summarises complex debate and ensures that clear and unambiguous decisions are made based on appropriate evidence
- Builds effective and respectful relationships with Members, officers and representatives of outside organisations in order to carry out role
- Develops networks and looks externally for best practice.

SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

- Advanced chairing skills, including the ability to manage conflict
- Ability to plan and prioritise the business of the Committee, having regard to its terms of reference and key challenges facing the relevant function

- Able to be agile and to adapt personal style and the working of the Committee to obtain input from all relevant partners and the community.
- Working knowledge of the professional disciplines, services and constitutional requirements relevant to the work of the Committee
- Excellent communication skills
- Excellent listening, questioning as well as influencing and negotiation skills.

Cabinet Member

The Cabinet Member takes strategic responsibility for, and is accountable for, a named portfolio of services, including the initiation of specific relevant policy. They provide collective and individual leadership as part of the Cabinet.

The Cabinet Member represents and champions the Council on outside organisations, and contributes the Council's perspective to national, regional and sub-regional bodies, feeding back insights and learning to inform the Council's decision-making.

ACCOUNTABILITIES

Political vision and strategic direction
- Develop and deliver a vision for the portfolio in keeping with manifesto commitments
- Work closely with senior officers to ensure the vision is translated into robust strategic direction and priorities for action
- Develop a high level of understanding of the services and policies related to the portfolio and the key strategic issues relating to them
- Ensure the political vision and direction for the portfolio is in line with the Council's overall corporate direction
- Contribute to the development of the Council's overall priorities

Leading change and innovation
- Translate strategic direction into necessary change and innovation programmes with appropriate pace, urgency and effectiveness
- Provide political lead for change and motivating others
- Encourage a learning, reflective approach to change and innovation

Communicating messages
- Communicate and positively promote the portfolio's vision and direction to a range of audiences, explaining new initiatives, changes and opportunities, using an appropriate range of channels and approaches
- Be a visible champion for the portfolio service area in the community
- Promote and defend the political decisions and achievements of the administration

Effective decision-making
- Exercise delegated powers in accordance with the Constitution
- Take informed and effective decisions in a timely way, seeking advice from senior officers as appropriate

- Attend Cabinet meetings and take collective responsibility for decisions taken
- Work with local communities and stakeholders to ensure that the voice of residents is heard in policy development and decision making

Performance monitoring and making a difference
- Ensure effective performance management systems are in place for the portfolio
- Ensure effective financial management and achievement of best value for taxpayers
- Monitor performance and budgets systematically, working closely with senior officers to ensure targets are met
- Address poor performance
- Ensure the achievement of impact and agreed outcomes

Effective partnerships and systems leadership
- Ensure that the work of the portfolio is focused outwards
- Work effectively with a range of partners – public, private, voluntary and community
- Address blockages in partnership working where required

Working in partnership with officers
- Work effectively and professionally with senior and less senior officers

Political skills
- Work skilfully with the political group to ensure support and maintain group cohesion
- Develop political alliances and strategies

Governance and accountability
- Be visibly accountable and answerable for the portfolio
- Support and develop good governance for portfolio areas
- Respect, value and respond to Scrutiny and Overview effectively

SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

- Understand the statutory and political responsibilities in relation to the portfolio and its relationship with other portfolios within the Cabinet
- Understanding of the Council budget, particularly that of the relevant portfolio
- Understand 'systems leadership' and leadership of place
- Able to communicate vision and strategic direction effectively to a range of audiences
- Understand the respective roles of members and officers
- Aware of the political terrain in the authority

- Able to challenge the status quo and deal with complex strategic issues and problems
- Understand the principles and importance of making sound, evidenced-based decisions
- Able to work with the Leader of the Council and other Cabinet members as a team
- Excellent chairing skills to be able to chair meetings relating to the portfolio
- Able to get things done, manage a busy and complex workload, often to tight timescales and deadlines
- Able to assimilate and analyse complex information
- Able to work as part of an effective team
- Able to build relationships with residents, other Cabinet colleagues, senior officers, Scrutiny and Overview, partners, other organisations etc.
- Able to work with residents and community organisations to inform policy development and decision making
- Excellent communication, presentation and advanced public speaking skills
- Excellent listening, questioning and negotiation skills
- Understand the legally defined roles of certain senior officers
- Detailed knowledge of the challenges facing local government
- Knowledge of the work of national, regional and sub-regional bodies and the role of the Council within them
- Knowledge of the role of local partners and the services they deliver
- Ambassadorial skills, to be able to represent the Council within and outside the borough

Appendix 3: Current Members Handbook contents list

Essentials
- Council Diary
- Surgeries
- Member petitions
- Who to contact
- Casework
- General enquiries
- Councillor questions
- Statutory Officers
- Allowances and expenses
- Confidentiality and information protection

Responding to Civil Emergencies
- How does it work in Croydon?
- The role of Councillors
- How will you be communicated with?
- Media handling
- Further information

Members' ICT
- Office 365 and Smartphone
- How to access Outlook web access for Office 365 email
- How to print to Council printers from your own device
- How to access the Council intranet from your ow device
- Paperless meetings

Council facilities
- Members' areas
- How to book meeting rooms
- Town Hall evacuation procedure

About Croydon and the Council
- The Constitution
- Full Council
- The Leader and Cabinet
- Chief Executive
- Scrutiny and Overview Committee
- Non-Executive Committees
- Shadow Cabinet
- Key decisions
- Budget and Policy Framework
- Croydon Observatory

Code of Conduct
- A guide for Members
- Frequently asked questions
- Bias, determination and predisposition
- Staff and Councillor Working Relations

Ward budgets
- Funding criteria
- Budgets
- Identifying projects to be funded
- Awarding funding
- Monitoring
- Advice workshops
- Proforma

Appendix 4: Members safety guidance

Keeping safe, feeling safe – guidance for Members

Contents

Introduction

This guidance has been developed for Croydon Members, based on a resource developed by the Local Government Association, which was in turn informed by organisations such as the Suzy Lamplugh Trust.

This guide is not intended to alarm, but to suggest some steps you can undertake to protect yourself as a person in a public position, and how to respond if an incident occurs. There is legislation designed to protect not only Members of the Council but the general public as a whole, and this guide provides some advice on it.

The guide refers to public intimidation, which is defined as *'words and/or behaviour intended or likely to block, influence or deter participation in public debate, or causing alarm or distress which could lead to an individual wanting to withdraw from public life'.*

This includes discriminatory, physical, psychological and verbal actions such as: physical attacks; being stalked, followed or loitered around; threats of harm; distribution of misinformation; character assassination; inappropriate emails, letters, phone calls and communications on social media; sexual harassment or sexual assault; and other threatening behaviours.

If public intimidation is taking place and a crime has been committed it is important that it is recorded and reported so that the scale and nature of the issue can be better understood.

This guide does not take the place of legal advice or personalised advice from the police on offences or personal security. If you or someone else is in immediate danger or harm, contact the police. If you are concerned about your personal safety or security as a result of abuse, harassment or intimidation and would like advice, contact the Council's Security Manager (see below).

Getting help

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                          │  Concerns about personal │
                          │         safety?          │
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Serious offence committed? In immediate danger? Risk of damage to property? Serious disruption to public likely?	Been a victim of crime? Witnessed a crime?	Experienced intimidation and want confidential support/ advice? Want advice on personal safety?	Experiencing repeated intimidation and want the Council to consider legal action?	Feeling anxious/ worried? Impact on physical/ mental health?
Call 999	**Call 101**	**Contact Council's Security Manager**	**Contact the Monitoring Officer**	**Contact the Employee Assistance Programme**

Call **999** if:
- A serious offence is in progress or has just been committed
- Someone is in immediate danger or harm
- Property is in danger of being damaged
- A serious disruption to the public is likely

Call **101** or report online if:
- You've been the victim of crime
- You've witnessed a crime

Contact the Council's Security Manager (**FMHelpdesk@croydon.gov.uk**) if:
- You've received intimidatory contact or communication from an external or internal source and would like a confidential conversation, support and advice
- You'd like advice on personal safety

An allegation of more serious criminal activity may need to be taken further but the Security Manager can advise on the approach to take.

Contact the **Monitoring Officer** if:
- You are experiencing repeated harassment/ intimidation etc and would like to discuss potential legal action that the Council could take.

General advice on handling intimidation

The most important factor in deciding how to respond to intimidation is the impact it is having on you. Regardless of what others may think, if it is having an effect on you, then that is sufficient for you to take action.

The police will take hate crimes relating to racial or religious issues very seriously, and additionally, crimes related to disability, transgender status or sexual orientation can be treated as relevant factors in sentencing.

Key points
- Keep a record of any intimidatory communication or behaviour
- Consider the context, content and frequency of intimidation
- Action can be taken retrospectively
- Take care when making contact with unknown or anonymous individuals
- Where you feel safe to do so, do speak out against harassment and intimidation of others and address any inappropriate and disrespectful behaviour

If you think you are being subjected to intimidation:
- Make sure your immediate safety isn't at risk: if it is, contact the police.
- If you are concerned about your personal safety, raise this with the Council's Security Manager and police, so that they can help you review your own security and personal safety and there is a record of the impact the incident/ behaviour is having. This could include an impact on your personal or work activities and those of your family.
- If possible, record or diarise the encounter or communication as soon as possible after the event. Save a copy of an email or letter. You can write in a diary a record of a phone call or face-to-face discussion, and keep a screen shot of a social media incident. You can also take photos of damage or even a computer screen. Even if this is the first or only incident for you, others may also have been subjected to intimidation and a collective record is important if future action is to be taken. It's also important that incidents relating to the same individual(s) is recorded as such evidence could be critical in a criminal prosecution.
- 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 contact. The Council's Security Manager can discuss the incident with you to help you make your decision.
- Raising the incident with the Council's Security Manager and/or anyone nominated by your political group to provide support will also help establish if others have been subject to the same or similar behaviour.
- If a serious potential crime has occurred, formally report it to the police (and to the Council's Security Manager) particularly if there has been a serious threat to life or anticipated violence. The Council will be able to check if the individual(s) who is alleged to have been intimidating is on its register of potentially violent people (the 'Red File') and if not, to ensure that the name is added.
- If the letters, phone calls, social media communications and/or emails continue, you may need to consider further steps such as advising the individual that such abuse will be referred to the police and that you will not correspond with you further.

- The Monitoring Officer can provide advice on the potential to take out an injunction against an individual who continues to behave in an abusive or intimidatory manner.

The SHIELD principles
- *Safeguard* – where possible, protect yourself online and in person. For example, set out in any online biography or page that abusive, threatening or intimidatory communication or actions will be reported, utilise security features, take personal safety precautions and have a point of contact in the local police for any incidents.
- *Help* – in any situation ensure you are safe before you take further action and get help if needed by calling the police. If the threat is not immediate, you can report it by calling 101 and contact the Council's Security Manager and/or someone with a role to provide support from your political group.
- *Inform* – you can inform the individual or group that you consider their communication or action as intimidating, threatening or abusive. There is a growing movement of 'digital citizenship', which encourages the labelling of poor online conduct as a way of challenging such behaviour.
- *Evidence* – if you consider that a communication or action is intimidatory, threatening or abusive, gather evidence. For example, photos, recordings, screen-shots, letters, emails, details of witnesses, etc.
- *Let people know* – report the incident to your social media platform/officers/party contact/lead member/the police; depending on the nature and severity of the incident(s). Be prepared that the police and courts will look to determine if the incident is intimidation based on the theoretical opinion of the average person.
- *Decide* – determine whether you want to continue receiving communications from the individual or group and block or mute if on social media where appropriate. Decide if you want to pursue any action to inhibit the ability of the individual or group to approach you.

Intimidation on the telephone
- Continue to be polite and try to stay calm – ensuring you are safe
- If you have a recording function on your phone, particularly a mobile phone, switch this on. You can also use your mobile phone to record a landline call by switching on the voice recording function and holding it to the landline phone: indicate to the person on the phone that you consider that they are trying to intimidate you and that calls may be recorded
- Try to identify what the complaint is about if there is one
- Try to identify the name, address and telephone number if you can
- Remember not to reveal any personal details
- Sometimes a suggestion that the caller refers the matter to the Council's procedure for complaints about Members (or council services, as appropriate) may result in a solution for the caller
- If the call continues with threats, abuse and/or intimidation, you can end the call, letting the caller know you will do this
- Make a note of any details of the call you can remember, particularly the person's phone number
- If you are concerned, make a report to the Council's Security Manager.

Being abused or intimidated, whether in person or remotely, can have an impact on your mental health. If you are feeling anxious or worried, or if it is affecting your daily routines such as sleeping or eating, or if you have any other concerns about your health, do speak to your GP. You can also access free counselling and health and wellbeing support through the **Employee Assistance Programme**.

Personal safety

An important role of a ward councillor is to keep in touch with their residents and communities. This includes helping individuals with any problems they might have, which might extend beyond just the delivery of council services. These contacts are usually rewarding and non-adversarial. However, councillors 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 councillors will deal with constituents on a face to face basis when alone.

The purpose of this section of the guidance is to set out what personal safety and security measures you could take to prevent and deal with those rare circumstances when you might find yourself in situations where you are concerned for your safety.

Most councillors will not experience any problems during their term(s) of office, but a little time given to the preparation and planning can reduce any risk.

You are encouraged to:
- assess personal risks in carrying out your public duties
- recognise potential danger from personal contact or internet / postal communication and take appropriate action
- be proactive in considering personal safety through, for instance, buying a personal alarm, ensuring 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.

Key points
- Consider your personal safety and incorporate it into planning any public duties or interaction, with advice and support from the Council's Security Manager.
- Much personal safety is common sense, but it is useful to remind yourself of the advice.

Ward surgeries
The arrangements you can make will vary according to your local circumstances and it will be a fortunate councillor who can find premises for their surgery which meet every aspect of good practice and are also accessible to their constituents.

The following suggestions are designed to help make a ward surgery safer and more effective:

- Not holding surgeries alone in an otherwise empty building. Try to get someone to act as receptionist. This not only makes you safer, but also makes it much easier to manage a busy surgery. If you are currently holding surgeries alone, you could discuss how this can be overcome with fellow councillors or council officers.
- If you cannot avoid holding surgeries on your own, you can try to reduce any risk by considering the layout of the room, for example, sitting 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). You can make sure there are no heavy items in the room that could be used as weapons and generally declutter the room.
- If possible, a separate and comfortable waiting area for constituents allows for a preliminary assessment.
- Have a plan for any helpers or staff regarding what to do in an emergency that you review and test regularly. This could include having an emergency word or phrase you can use to ask for assistance.
- Have an incident log book to record any incidents. This should include all types of unacceptable behaviour and should be dated, timed and signed in case further action is required.
- If you are at the stage of looking for suitable premises in which to hold a surgery, the following can help when considering personal safety:
  - council premises (e.g. libraries) during opening hours or other premises where there are many other people about
  - premises close to members of staff or other people in case you need assistance
  - premises where the names of any visitors for councillors are recorded
  - premises where there is a comfortable waiting area
  - easy access to a landline or an alarm linked to reception
  - a clear and agreed procedure for dealing with a call for assistance
  - is in view of a public area or a reception
  - a vision panel in the door
  - a swift means of escape and any visitors are not able to lock the door from the inside.
- It can be useful to make the following personal security checks:
  - Are council staff/friends/family aware of where and when I am holding my surgery? Will they check on me if the meeting takes longer than expected? Do they know how to contact me?
  - How do I call for help if I need to? Have I got my mobile phone with me, is the battery charged and can I get a signal? Do I have a personal safety alarm with me that is working?
  - Is the visitor displaying signs of irrational, aggressive or confrontational behaviour? Am I sat at their level and using eye contact and open and gestures to display a helpful attitude?
  - Do I think it is safe for me to conduct this surgery? Do I need to consider other options, such as a fellow councillor supporting me during the surgery? Do I need to call the police?
  - Have I checked the room to make sure it is set up correctly with no items lying around that could be used as weapons?
  - Is my chair nearest the door, so I can get out quickly if I need to?

- Am I aware of the quickest way out of the area or building and is there a safe location identified for me to go in case of any issues?

You may find it helpful to systematically assess any risks associated with the venue (or potential venue) for your ward surgery, using the points in this guidance. If you would like to use a template to do this, or would like any further advice having done so, contact the Council's Security Manager.

You can also undertake conflict resolution training if you want to have additional skills in dealing with a potentially volatile situation.

Dealing with a variety of 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 within your rights to 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 let the Council's Security Manager know about the incident. You can decide if you want to inform the police.

Some constituents seeking a councillor's help may have additional needs or a mental health condition, and it is important that they are still able to seek advice and representation from their councillor. They may just require suitable adjustments to be made and for an understanding of the nature of their condition. Advice on supporting such individuals is available from a number of organisations, including the **Autistic Society** and **Mind**.

Home visits
Councillors do sometimes visit residents in their homes, especially those who are elderly, disabled, have additional needs or where they simply want to see for themselves the conditions that are the subject of complaints.

It is for each councillor to decide whether a particular home visit should be made, especially if the person to be visited is unknown to the councillor. Most councillors trust their own instincts as to whether to meet someone alone. However, if you have any doubts about the safety of the premises you are to visit and the purpose of the visit is not about the premises itself then arrange for the meeting to take place at a neutral venue.

If a home visit is undertaken, the following general personal safety issues can be considered and planned before the visit:
- arrange the visit during normal working and daylight hours, if possible
- if appropriate, ask the Council's Security Manager to refer to the 'Red File' scheme of potentially violent people
- 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. It would be advisable to let colleagues or family members know when you expect to finish.

During a home visit, you can consider the following specific personal safety advice:
- 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. This needs to be something you have agreed with someone which will alert them that you think you might have a problem
- park your car so that it can be driven away easily and park in a well-lit area near other vehicles, if possible
- stay alert when approaching the property, and look around the garden for obvious dangers, for example dogs or prowlers
- after knocking, stand back and to the side of the door and do not stand on the edge of any steps
- be aware of potential weapons
- you can ask for any dogs or other pets to be secured
- assess the situation and mood of the resident. Also note any other people in the property and their mood
- if in any doubt or you feel threatened, do not enter, make an excuse and leave
- only sit down when the resident does
- where possible, sit in an upright chair as this is easier to stand up from without a barrier. If you have to sit in an armchair or settee, sit on the edge near the arm. This will enable you to stand up more easily. Look for any alternative escape routes
if the situation changes and you feel threatened, make an excuse and leave. Back out rather than turning your back on the resident.

If a serious situation occurs, vacate the premises immediately and report the incident.

If you are unable to leave immediately when a serious situation occurs, you can:
- 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, if you have one, or scream or shout to attract the attention of others. The use of reasonable force to protect yourself can be a last resort.

Potentially violent persons register
The council has a database of the names and addresses of known violent people (or people who have threatened violence), to be shared across the Council to assist in protecting the health and safety of staff and contractors. It is not a database of people that staff think could be violent, nor is it a scheme for registering other concerns about people or premises.

Prior to undertaking a home visit, you can contact the Security Manager about potentially violent persons and he will check the Red File for you.

Lone working
If you are working alone you might consider the following:

- 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
- 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 and discussing it with another councillor or the Council's Security Manager, if there are a number of risks associated with a particular visit, for their view on whether a visit should be undertaken.

Personal callers to councillors' private homes

Most councillors seek to maintain a balance between their personal and public lives and do not want to encourage any callers at their private homes. Publicity as to how to contact councillors and details of ward surgeries reduces the chances of unwanted callers. Contact details for councillors can be found on the council's website, although councillors do not need to show their address on the published election nomination paper or on the council's 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 in support.

It is inadvisable to see an unannounced caller in your home. You can suggest making an appointment, but if you have any doubts as to their intention or if they appear angry/aggressive, then contact the police.

If you believe you are safe, you can try to identify their name and address and the nature of the issue they want to discuss, conducting any discussion outside the house.

If you do feel under threat you can carry a personal alarm, perhaps keeping it at the door for easy access.

If you have another person with you inside the house they could take a photo of the person or film the encounter, but be aware that this is likely to inflame the situation if the person is aware of it and they may become more aggressive – this should really be a last resort if you want evidence for the police.

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.

Once the incident is over, record as much as you can, including descriptions, should you decide to take any action over the matter. If you are concerned, report the incident to the council and/or the police.

Home security

As a person with a public profile it is advisable to maintain a decent level and awareness of home security. The following is general advice on what to consider in making your home safe and secure:

- Try to make it clear via boundaries the difference between public and private space. Front boundaries should be kept low so they don't provide hiding places and to enable good natural surveillance.
- Keep fences and walls in a good state of repair and consider your planting to reduce the availability of handholds and to put off prospective intruders
- Remember to lock your garages, outbuildings, sheds, etc. Ensure they are fitted with high-quality and secure locking devices, and you can add extra locks if you are concerned.
- Ensure tools and ladders, which could be used to access your home, are locked away, and remove anything that could potentially be used to cause damage, such as loose bricks or large stones.
- If possible, keep your dustbin and recycling bins secure until collection day to prevent them being used as climbing aids.
- Obscure the view into your home by fitting blinds, curtains or film including glazed exterior doors. Get into the habit of closing curtains or blinds when occupying a well-lit room.
- Do not label your keys – if you need to identify keys, use a colour-code theme, and keep control of your door keys. Make sure you know who has copies and if you cannot account for all the keys, change the locks. Do not give keys to people you do not know, eg trades people.
- If you are planning on installing a home alarm or CCTV, the police recommend that you select an installer who is affiliated to one of the recognised alarm and CCTV inspectorate bodies, such as the **National Security Inspectorate** (NSI) or the **Security Systems and Alarms Inspection Board** (SSAIB).
- In order to identify visitors at night, good external lighting is recommended, alongside low wattage lighting is recommended to illuminate all external doors, car parking and garage areas and footpaths leading to your home.
- Additional useful information is available at **SecuredbyDesign**.

Attendance at meetings

Members of the Council have to attend evening meetings which often finish after dark. It is possible, 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 who also attended the meeting.

Demonstrations

It is possible, due to the nature of the difficult decisions that Members have to make, that 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

- 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.

It is not recommended to confront the protestors.

Travelling
When travelling **by car**, it is advisable to consider your personal safety by:
- having your keys in your hand or easily accessible
- investigating whether an area will be dark and isolated when you return to your car
- parking where possible, under street lighting and not in dark, deserted streets or isolated car parks
- parking on the ground floor in multi-storey car parks away from stairs and lifts and reversing into the parking space
- always locking the car doors when you get into the car and when leaving it
- taking boxes/bags to the car when other people are around
- always carrying a torch with you
- looking around your vehicle as you approach in case someone is crouching down
- looking inside before entering your vehicle to ensure no one is hiding there (even if the doors were locked)
- avoiding placing handbags, valuables or other such items on the passenger seat
- parking on the left hand side of the road facing the way you want to drive off
- trying to park in a space where you will not be blocked in
- avoiding having identifying stickers in your car locking the door at service stations when you go to pay
- ensuring your vehicle has sufficient fuel for the journey and refuel during daylight hours;
- not getting out if you are followed in your vehicle, and ensuring the car is locked, flashing your lights and sounding your horn to attract attention
- not winding down your window if someone taps on it, unless the individual is known to you.
- Be alert to any visual changes to your vehicle. If you notice a suspicious object on or near the vehicle, do not approach or enter it. Contact the police and give them the location and registration number of your vehicle.
- Don't leave laptops, documents, parking permits or papers in unattended vehicles, as they may identify you.

When travelling **by public transport**, it is advisable to consider your personal safety by:
- having the right change or your pass available so that you do not have to bring out your purse or wallet
- ensuring that you know travel times – particularly the details of the last bus / train of the day
- waiting for a bus or train in a well-lit place near other people, whenever possible, and paying attention to your environment
- carrying "emergency" money so that if a bus or train does not turn up, you are able to call a taxi
- sitting on the lower deck and near the driver if a bus is empty or it is after dark

- on trains, choosing carriages that are well-populated and not hesitating to move seats if you feel uncomfortable where you are
- on trains, if you sit next to the door make sure that you keep your mobile telephone close to you. A common crime is for a thief to grab a telephone and make a dash just as doors are closing
- avoiding compartments which have no access to corridors or other parts of the train
- sitting with other people and avoiding empty carriages
- if you do feel threatened, making as much noise as possible to attract the attention of the driver or guard
- if you can, arranging for someone to meet you at the bus stop or train station, particularly if travelling at night or in an unfamiliar area. If this is not possible, try to walking near other people with whom you feel safe, and walk purposefully to your destination
- always carrying the telephone number of a trusted, licensed company with you
- ensuring any pre-booked licensed minicab driver has ID and it that it matches the driver and the vehicle's photographic licence. If it does not, do not get in the cab
- when booking a taxi or minicab, asking for the driver's name, as well as the make and colour of the car. Confirm the driver's details when they arrive – is it the taxi or minicab you ordered?
- sharing a taxi or minicab with a friend and sitting in the back of the car are good safety strategies
- minicabs that pick up fares on the street, without being pre-booked, are illegal, uninsured and potentially very dangerous.

When travelling **by bike,** it is advisable to consider your personal safety by:
- keeping your bike in good working order
- wearing a fluorescent belt or jacket and always using lights
- wearing a cycling helmet;
- securing your bicycle with a good quality chain and padlock.

When **walking**, it is advisable to consider your personal safety by:
- checking that you know where you are going
- considering what your walk will be like at night if you are travelling at that time.
- being prepared to walk a longer way around to keep safe
- wearing comfortable shoes that you can move quickly in, if you need to
- considering carrying a personal alarm, and if you do, making sure that it is accessible
- tucking a scarf or long hair inside your coat
- carrying any bag or handbag across your shoulder.

Reporting incidents
If you consider any incident to be severe, contact the police. Even if an incident is not considered serious enough to involve the police, it should always be reported to the council. If you have been subject to, or witnessed a hate incident or crime you have a duty to report it. By taking appropriate action you may help to prevent a similar incident reoccurring.

Although the purpose of this guide is not to cover this in detail, it provides a good opportunity to highlight the current safety advice should such an incident occur.

The main 'Stay Safe' principles are to "Run – Hide – Tell". If you would like more information you can refer to the **National Counter Terrorism Support Office's website**.

Members and social media

Key points
- Social media can be very useful in getting feedback on proposals and communicating information about Members' activities. However, remember that not everybody is on social media and so opinions expressed may not be representative.
- Social media is always on, so consider setting personal limits and establishing your own routine. You have no obligation to respond to posts and comments at any speed but it is often helpful to explicitly indicate that to users.
- Members are subject to the Council's Code of Conduct when using social media.
- Consider the content of your communications carefully and apply this test – if you would be reluctant to say it face-to-face or in an official email, then it is probably inappropriate to say online.
- Once something is posted on social media, it is difficult to retain control over how it will be used. Think about this when posting.
- Different platforms allow for different types of interactions. It is useful to indicate the aims and intended audiences of your different accounts.

Online safety, personal security and digital citizenship
Digital Citizenship, which has begun to be taught in schools, is about engaging in appropriate and responsible behaviour when using technology, and encouraging others to do so as well. It encompasses digital literacy, ethics, etiquette, online safety, norms, rights, culture and more.

Developing digital citizenship requires us to improve online political communications. It is about expressing our opinions while respecting others' rights and personas and avoiding putting them at risk or causing unnecessary distress. It is about respecting freedom of speech and dissidence while condemning abuse.

In any personal online biography, it is advisable to make clear that the views are your own and may not represent the views of the council. If space allows, you may also want to set out the aims of the page, the 'response' policy, such as "I welcome questions via email" and an 'engagement' policy, such as "abusive content will be removed".

It is easy to put personal information online, such as your birthday, routines, places you frequent, future visits, holiday destinations, relationships, and opinions, etc, which are then available for anyone in the public domain to access. For personal safety, as well as identity security, you may want to consider whether you share personal information, images of friends and/or family and details of any routines.

You can 'search for yourself' to check what information you can find out about yourself, your family or your business on-line. Checking this regularly means you can check what is in the public domain and edit it if necessary and possible.

Social media platforms have different privacy options. You can choose different levels and change them depending on your own preferences.

Social media posts now include location-based information, particularly from mobile phones, which tells people exactly where you are or where you have been. Again, with personal security and privacy in mind, you may want to turn off these notifications.

It is advisable not to include on social media details such as your personal phone numbers, home address, details of family members or vehicle details.

A photo can relay personal information you may not want shared on social media. It is advisable to only publish photos of family, friends and colleagues with your consent and theirs, to ensure photos don't reveal your home or places frequented with family members such as schools or care homes, and to disable automatic photo and location tagging so that you have to approve another user identifying you in a photo or being at a specific location. You may also want to make your family and friends aware that you will be following these precautions.

Having a social media presence means that people can contact you at any time. This is great in terms of accessibility but means that they may expect you to reply immediately, which can create a sense of pressure. It is useful to set your own rules and limits for how you manage your social media presence.

You can be sent phishing requests and malicious software on social media the same as you can on email, so maintain the same level of vigilance.

Be aware of safeguarding because social media sites are often misused by offenders. Safeguarding is everyone's business – if you have any concerns about other site users, you have a responsibility to report these.

The usual protocols regarding confidential information, copyright, data protection, pre-election periods, exempt reports, etc, apply to social media. Avoid publishing anything where there is doubt or seek permission in advance.

To be an effective councillor you won't stop meeting people and posting leaflets simply because you are posting online. You will know your residents best - consider which channel works best for them to connect with you, online and offline.

Be aware that social media is the principal form in which misinformation spreads. It is a civic responsibility to stop the spread of this and misinformation. Very often articles that spread false information trigger strong emotional responses such as fear, anger or shock to maximise shareability. Individuals posting online are responsible for the content of their

posts even if they did not originally create it. Members should very carefully consider the content of new posts, posts they have shared and posts they support.

Be aware that some individuals post socially unacceptable, defamatory, inciting or even intimidatory remarks to generate online activity on the back of advertising or promotion of ideologies, brands or events. Similarly, the term "internet troll" is used to refer to a person or group of people who deliberately start arguments or upset people by posting inflammatory or off-topic messages online with the deliberate intent of provoking readers into an emotional response or of otherwise disrupting normal discussion, often for their own amusement.

Some people say things via social media that they probably would not say in person, and they can post false information, insults or messages that you would not want to be associated with you. These can multiply and be shared quite rapidly. Councillors, and in particular female, LGTBQ+ and BAME councillors, are unfortunately increasingly the subject of online abuse, bullying and harassment on social media. See the section below on handling abuse on social media for advice on how to manage this.

The Local Government Association provides **guidance and tools to support councillors in their online communications**, including rules of engagement for councillors and candidates. The Council's social media guidance is on the intranet: for advice contact press@croydon.gov.uk

Responsibilities of Members on social media
Members are personally responsible for the content they publish on any form of social media. Publishing an untrue statement about a person which is damaging to their reputation may incur a defamation action for which you will be personally liable. The same applies if you pass on any similar untrue statements you receive.

Social media sites are in the public domain and it is important to ensure you are confident of the nature of the information you publish. Once published, content is almost impossible to control and may be manipulated without your consent, used in different contexts, or further distributed.

You can make use of stringent privacy settings if you do not want your social media to be accessed by the press or public. It is advisable to read the terms of service of any social media site accessed and make sure you understand their confidentiality / privacy settings.

Some Members choose to have separate social media profiles for personal and council use. It is important to keep in mind, however, that even the strictest privacy settings is no guarantee for posts or actions to remain private. As a rule of thumb, never post anything online you would not be comfortable saying or sharing in a public meeting.

The Members' Code of Conduct and relevant legislation continues to apply online and in social media. If you are referring online in any way to your role as a Member of the Council, you are deemed to be acting in your "official capacity" and any conduct may fall within the code.

<u>Managing or moderating your own Facebook group or page</u>
You may wish to set up your own councillor or community page on Facebook. These are valuable platforms to promote local information, news, events or council developments or seek people's views on community or council proposals.

Members of the community and others can contribute and comment in an interactive manner and whilst most is constructive and uses acceptable language, some individuals may use bad language or 'cross the line' into abuse or harassment.

It is useful to indicate at the top of the page, what the purpose of the page is and what the intended audience is.

If you are a Group or Page administrator, Facebook provides you with a range of tools to manage and moderate other people's content or contributions to your Group or Page for more serious breaches of standards. You can:
• block certain words or apply a 'profanity filter' in the settings, this will stop such postings appearing in your page
• hide or delete comments, photos or tags
• ban or remove someone from your pages

Useful guidance and instructions are available on the 'Banning and Moderation' section of Facebook.

Administering a large Group can be a lot of work, particularly if group members are active. If that's the case, you might want to share the responsibility with other councillors, friends or trusted community members. **<u>Guidance</u>** on making other people or administrators is available on Facebook.

<u>Managing your Twitter account</u>
Twitter works differently than Facebook in many ways and allows different kinds of interactions. Facebook posts can be more informative because they do not have a limit to the number of characters. Twitter posts are limited to 280 characters and tend to have a shorter lifespan than Facebook posts.

When someone follows you on Twitter your posts will appear on their news feeds, giving them a real-time opportunity to comment on them. Abuse, harassment and intimidation can take place and escalate quickly. Twitter does not automatically remove abusive or threatening posts but there are actions you can take:
• Protect your Tweets so they will only be visible to your followers. You will have the choice to accept or decline people's request to follow you.
• Filter Notifications - if you're receiving unwanted replies or mentions from accounts you do not follow, you can filter the types of notifications you receive.
• Consider carefully what you post before doing it. With 250 characters available to explain often complex ideas, Twitter posts can easily be taken out of context.

<u>Dealing with harmful rumours and misinformation</u>

It is difficult not to engage when you are the subject of rumours, misinformation and smear campaigns. While it is always tempting to respond and clarify every rumour and falsehood circulated about you, it is also useful to think about the emotional, economic and time costs of engaging as in many cases, rumours disappear as quickly as they emerged. Councillors and supporting officials have shared some strategies they have found useful to deal with this:

- Calmly try to understand who is behind the attack. Most of the time, they are people with a clear agenda trying to gain control or to manipulate.
- Correct the facts. This can be done with a formal statement or if you can identify the source, then do it publicly by correcting their posts with facts and evidence. Remember that supporting officers are there to give advice, support and provide facts.
- Remember that rumours and misinformation are fed by repetition. It is good to defend your reputation but councillors and supporting officials find that the most efficient way is to do it once and then stop engaging this way.
- Leave the environment the rumour is being spread. A smear campaign tries to manipulate and gain control but no control can be gained if you do not participate. You may wish to advise your followers that you will be logging out of social media for a period of time, which gives the rumour time to calm down while protecting your own emotional and mental wellbeing.
- Rumours and smear campaigns can be very stressful and at times, they can feel very isolating. Keep your self-confidence by talking to family, friends and others in your support network. Some may also feel able to counteract rumours with factual information.
- If you can identify the source of the rumours and smear campaigns, you should document it and keep a record. This may be useful if further disciplinary or legal action is required.

Handling abuse on social media

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

You are best placed to determine whether a post or interaction is abusive or intimidating, and if you feel intimidated you can take action to report it.

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. However, it does not necessarily follow that the police or courts will regard it as intimidatory behaviour in law as they have to apply their own 'average person' tests – also known as 'reasonableness tests' or the **'Clapham omnibus'** test.

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.

<u>Key points</u>
- Keep a record of any abuse
- Carefully consider how and whether to respond to inaccurate or defamatory social media comments
- Report any abuse to the social media companies for its deletion or to raise concerns about an account

<u>Keep a record</u>
If you have received online abuse, even if you are not overly concerned or if you intend to ignore it, you should consider keeping a record 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 are keeping a record of all messages and may refer them to the appropriate authorities, which may stop them posting further comments or might encourage them to delete them.

<u>Tackling abuse on social media</u>
In any situation that arises on social media, you will need to decide whether you want to engage in a discussion or ignore it, and whether the communication is abusive, intimidatory or threatening.

When determining whether to engage or ignore, you'll need to balance the risks and likely success of either approach in stopping the situation. Engaging in online discussion could defuse it through the use of humour or similar, or could inflame the situation further. There is no right or wrong here. However, it is likely that the person posting has less of a following or public profile than you and by engaging you can increase their audience.

If the communication is abusive, intimidatory or threatening, then keep a record of it (such as a screen shot). You can post that you find the communication abusive, intimidatory or threatening if you want to highlight the poor online behaviour, and report it to the social media platform and to the police. You can also make the Council aware (via the Security Manager) that you have been subjected to online abuse, intimidation or threats in your role as a councillor so they can keep a record or take action as well.

If you think there are threats to your personal safety or security, you can ask for advice from the police. It may be useful to refer to the section on the legislation applicable to harassment and abuse to see if the communication falls into any of the categories so you can describe it to the police in these terms.

Perhaps most distressing is when multiple users all send abusive messages in quick succession or at the same time. This can be overwhelming and the structure of Twitter in particular means that the more posts and retweets, the more others see it, and they can be encouraged to add to the abuse. It can escalate very quickly. There are sadly some who will willingly add to the abuse for their own amusement, even if they are unaware of the details. This is a difficult situation to handle, particularly if the information is being held by another user. If this occurs, you are advised to make a record of the abuse, inform the social media

platform, the Council and the police if any of the tweets make significant personal threats. You may wish to remove the original post if you can. Often these things burn themselves out very quickly and the perpetrators move onto the next trend or victim.

If someone has posted some inaccurate information about you or the Council, and if the information is defamatory (a false statement that could harm your reputation), again, the first step is to gather evidence. You may then want to contact the individual initially to request that the tweet or post be deleted; some individuals may have made a mistake without malice and will remove their post immediately. Depending on the nature of the tweet or post and the number of followers who may have viewed the tweet, you may wish to seek a correction and/or an apology.

If this approach is unsuccessful or where a defamatory tweet or post causes serious concern or is part of a concerted campaign, in addition to informing the Council, you may wish take legal advice and to issue a "notice and take–down" letter via your solicitor (assuming you are able to locate the perpetrator). Although you may not have the intention of proceeding further, the threat of legal action is often a powerful deterrent and can prompt a swift and successful resolution.

If the tweet or post is a complaint about a council service, you can ask for contact details and pass the information to officers to follow up on and inform the individual that this is the course of action you are taking. This may help defuse any tensions.

Twitter: muting or blocking accounts
You may wish to unfollow, mute or even block a person or group who is persistently tweeting you or is being abusive or intimidatory. Guidance about to mute and block is available from Twitter, but in summary:
- *Muting* allows you to remove an account's tweets from your timeline but does not go as far as unfollowing or blocking the account. Muted accounts will not know that they have been muted and you can 'unmute' them at any time.
- *Blocking* allows you to restrict specific accounts from contacting you, seeing your tweets or following you. Unlike muting, the perpetrators can find out that they have been 'blocked' and may accuse you of avoiding their scrutiny; this may be a small price to pay if their behaviour is checked and can be easily rebutted if necessary.

Twitter: reporting abuse
Twitter itself promotes '**Rules**' encouraging constructive debate but it explicitly prohibits behaviour "...that crosses the line into abuse, including behaviour that harasses, intimidates, or uses fear to silence another user's voice".

If tweets are so offensive that you believe they violate Twitter's rules, you can **report** them to Twitter who may decide to take action. For further information about how to report 'violations' visit Twitter's how to report **violations** page.

If someone sends threatening, abusive or offensive messages via any social networking site, they could be committing an offence. The most relevant offences are 'harassment' and 'malicious communications'.

According to the police, harassment means a 'course of conduct' (i.e. two or more related occurrences) and the messages do not necessarily have to be violent in nature, but must be oppressive and need to have caused some alarm or distress.

An offence relating to malicious communications may be a single incident, but for an offence to have been committed, a message must be indecent, grossly offensive, obscene or threatening or menacing.

Facebook: tackling abuse
Facebook has slightly different '**Community Standards**' to Twitter and alternative methods of dealing with complaints.

You are also more likely to encounter community or campaign groups or pages which facilitate scrutiny of you, fellow councillors or your local council on Facebook, and some will have been set up specifically with that purpose in mind. If these groups are not moderated effectively, they can provide a conduit for abuse and harassment.

There is no right or wrong way with regards responding to a group or page which regularly criticises the Council or councillors; some believe that it is beneficial to engage constructively, to explain, inform or signpost and hopefully improve awareness, understanding and support, whilst others are more reluctant as it will require emotional energy and time and the likelihood of successful engagement may be limited.

If you are concerned about comments or postings about you 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.

Although Facebook encourages respectful behaviour and takes action to protect 'private individuals' from bullying and harassment, it permits 'open and critical discussion of people who are featured in the news or have a large public audience based on their profession or chosen activities'. Facebook does take action around 'credible threats' and 'hate speech'. There is a range of options for you to manage abuse or harassment on Facebook and full instructions are available on the Facebook **help page**:
- if you want a post removed from Facebook, you can ask the person who posted it to *remove it*
- if you don't like a story that appears in your news feed, you can *hide it*
- if you are not happy with a post you're tagged in, you can *remove the tag*
- you can *leave a conversation* at any time, though the other people in the conversation will be notified and you will no longer receive messages from the conversation
- you can *unfriend* or *block* another user; they will no longer be able to tag you or see things you post on your timeline
- If the post goes against Facebook's Community Standards you can *report* it to Facebook.

Blogs: tackling abuse

Blogs are a quick and easy way to set up mini–websites to discuss and air views on matters of interest.

Occasionally, blogs may take an interest in local, community matters and some have been set up specifically to scrutinise the local council or councillors. At other times, councillors may face negative comments on their own blog.

While scrutiny is a key part of local democracy and accountability, on occasions, some blogs may make unfair comments or untrue allegations or may include abusive or threatening commentary. Unlike Facebook and Twitter, there are no 'community rules or standards' to moderate or challenge such content.

Depending on the nature of the comments, councillors therefore have several choices:
- ignore them altogether and hope that few people read and become aware of the comments
- engage with the blogger and seek to assure, inform or correct the comments as appropriate. Bear in mind that this course of action may fuel and prolong the debate and abusive comments further
- if you are concerned that the blogger is harassing you, threatening you, spreading malicious communications or is defaming or libelling you, you may wish to record any evidence (such as screen shots) and seek further legal advice or refer the matter to the police.

Practical tips for handling online abuse

Councillors and supporting officials have shared the following practical tips, based on their experience and best practices, to prevent and handle online abuse:
1. **Set expectations** – point people to your **rules of engagement** and apply these consistently.
2. **Lead by example** – do not post comments that could be considered abusive, and avoid posting false or unverified information.
3. **Consider content** – some content will be more controversial than others. Consider before posting how you will manage engagement with this, for example only engaging in comments on the policy itself or directing people to consultation documents.
4. **Defuse conflict** – waiting to respond can take the heat out of situations, as can reframing your own language.
5. **Know when to step back** – you do not have to engage with abusive or threatening behaviour. You can set the record straight with factual information if you wish, but you can step away when you want to.
6. **Protect your privacy** – set different passwords for different accounts, and do not post information that can allow people to identify your whereabouts outside of official council business.
7. **Understand privacy settings** – there is a range of settings to help you manage who can see or comment on your posts.
8. **Get and give support** – where you feel able, provide support to fellow councillors online, and reach out to colleagues and the Council for support where needed.

9. ***Record abuse*** – screenshot comments and keep a record of abusive or threatening communications.
10. ***Report serious issues*** – if you feel unable to deal with online abuse yourself or have any concerns about your safety, report this to the Council's Security Manager and/or the police.

Glitch is a charity working to end online abuse which provides useful resources.

What does the law say?

This section sets out the legislation that applies to intimidation with the aim of helping councillors who are experiencing intimidation or abuse to classify it according to the legislation.

Key points
- Threats to kill, rape, commit serious violence, stalking and property damage are all criminal offences
- Intimidating behaviour that is face-to-face or by letter, telephone call or online is a criminal offence
- Members are encouraged to make a record of these incidents and report them. Even if it does not result in a criminal investigation or conviction, it is important that the collective scale of the issue is reported.

Legal background
Whilst the law on physical and verbal intimidation and abuse is better established and known, the law has been catching up with developments in the area of communication generally and the recent seriousness of intimidation arising from the conduct of democracy. This includes the speed and available uses of the internet as well as the subsequent significant growth in the use of social media in both promoting political causes and discussions with residents and voters.

Members are not employees of the Council and do not have the benefit of safeguards in employment legislation if they suffer intimidation. You will be supported to undertake your duties safely and without fear or intimidation. Your political party may also offer support.

In undertaking your activities as a Member, you are protected by the same legislation relating to intimidation or threats as to any member of the public.

Balancing freedom of speech and its limitations
The right to freedom of expression is a fundamental human right of the greatest importance and a lynchpin of any democracy. However, it is not an absolute right as indicated in the three articles numbered 9, 10 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The key elements appear in article 10, which sets out that the freedom includes to right to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference from a public council.

The elements that have a bearing on councils are:

- Interests of public safety
- Prevention or disorder or crime
- Protection of health or morals
- Protection of the reputation or rights of others
- Preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence

All the above have been incorporated within UK legislation and thus restrict the extent to which freedom of speech is permitted.

Severity of intimidation

If you are feeling intimidated, then that experience is legitimate and should be your own test as to whether you want to report the situation. In determining whether an act is classed as intimidation in law, the police and the courts will apply their own tests based on the existing legislation and 'reasonableness'. However, legislation, guidance and case law evolves and this should not put you off reporting a situation and seeking a resolution should you feel you have been intimidated. In summary:

Threats to kill, rape, serious violence or actual common assault, damage to property (such arson) should be reported to the police. You may wish to review your own personal safety precautions and possibly those of your family. Harassment and stalking would also require police involvement, particularly if there were a number of occurrences. Action following intimidation arising from both face-to-face and online contact will depend upon the circumstances such as the number of communications or contacts, extent of obscene or violent language and whether the activity continued for a period of time including whether the abuser resorted to more than one method of abuse.

You are encouraged to record all instances that cause concern and in reporting to the police consider the requirement for detailed evidence to prove the case "beyond all reasonable doubt".

There have been a number of cases arising from the provisions of the 1997 Protection from Harassment Act where judges have provided guidance as to when the intimidation complained about should require the involvement of the civil or criminal law. The judge in the case of Dowson and Others v Chief Constable of Northumbria [2010] EWHC 26 set out six steps under the 1997 Act:

1. there must be conduct which occurs on at least two occasions
2. which is targeted at the individual
3. which is calculated in an objective sense to cause alarm or distress, and
4. which is objectively judged to be oppressive and unacceptable
5. what is oppressive and unacceptable may depend on the social or working context in which the conduct occurs
6. a line is to be drawn between conduct which is unattractive and unreasonable, and conduct which has been described in various ways such as "torment" of the victim, "or an order which would sustain criminal liability".

Although the courts look at the conduct from an objective point of view, the victim's reaction to the intimidation will be subjective and it will be for that individual to decide upon the action which is taken. The courts will also take a view on whether the perpetrator knows or ought to know that their conduct amounts to harassment.

Appendix – summary of offences and relevant legislation

This table sets out the range of offences classed as intimidatory offences. These range from face-to-face encounters to online activity.

Conduct	Legislation	Comment
The Act defines anti-social behaviour as "conduct that has caused, or is likely to cause, harassment, alarm or distress to any person"	Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014	
Improper use of public electronic communications network	Communications Act 2003 – Section 127	Sending message which is grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character.
Racially or religiously aggravated offences	Crime and Disorder Act 1998 – Sections 28 – 32	Hate crimes relating to racial or religious issues. Crimes relating to disability, transgender status or sexual orientation, treated as factors in sentencing. Subject to Law Commission review.
Cyberbullying	s360 of the Sentencing Act 2020

Malicious Communications Act 1988

Communications Act 2003

s 38 of the Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010

Defamation Act 2013 | The Defamation Act 2013 does not create a criminal offence but is a way of seeking redress against certain conduct |
| Discrimination due to Age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, race | Discrimination - The Equality Act 2010 | The Equality Act 2010 does not create a relevant free-standing criminal offence but is a way of |

Conduct	Legislation	Comment
including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin. religion		seeking redress against certain conduct
Restraining orders on conviction or on acquittal	Protection from Harassment Act 1997 – Sections 5 and 5A	Section 5A inserted in Domestic Violence Crime and Victims Act 2004 and both sections give court wide discretion to restrain defendant from contact with victim.
Stalking, involving fear of violence or serious alarm or distress	Protection from Harassment Act 1997 – Section 4A	Inserted by Protection of Freedom Act 2012, also requiring conduct "on at least two occasions".
Harassment which puts people in fear of violence	Protection from Harassment Act 1997 – Section 4	Requirement that the conduct has taken place "on at least two occasions".
Offence of stalking	Protection from Harassment Act 1997 – Section 2A	Inserted by Protection of Freedom Act 2012 and examples are detailed in 1997 Act
Prohibition of harassment	Protection from Harassment Act 1997 – Section 1	Applies when one or more people are subjected to harassment
Intimidation arising from investigation into or given evidence about an offence	Criminal Justice and Public order Act 1994 – Section 51	Applies if intimidation is reported to police and prosecution takes place
Unauthorised access to computer material	Computer Misuse Act 1990 – Section 1	Hacking into computer
Common assault and battery	Criminal Justice Act – Section 39	Common law offence which includes fear of, rather than actual, violence
Sending letters or other communications with intent to cause distress or anxiety	Malicious Communications Act 1988 – Section 1	Electronic communications and networks included in Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 and Communications Act 2003

Conduct	Legislation	Comment
Using threatening, abusive words or behaviour which may cause unlawful violence or harassment and alarm	Public Order Act 1986 – Section 4 and Section 4A	Applies for displaying any written material such as banners or posters
Threats to destroy or damage property	Criminal Damage Act 1971 – Section 2	"Without lawful excuse" or which could endanger life
Destroying or damaging property	Criminal Damage Act 1971 – Section 1	"Without lawful excuse" or being reckless as to action. Arson could, also, amount to threat to kill
Threats to kill	Offences Against the Person Act 1861 – Section 16	Threat "without lawful excuse"
Spread of rumours, slandering or vicious personal verbal attack on a person to destroy or damage that person's reputation or confidence	Defamation Act 2013 Section 1 of the Malicious Communications Act 1988	The Defamation Act 2013 does not create a criminal offence but is a way of seeking redress against certain conduct. Section 1 of the Malicious Communications Act 1988 criminalises the sending of a communication where the content is false and known or believed to be false by the sender and one of the purposes of sending is to cause distress or anxiety to the recipient or to any other person to whom he intends that it or its contents or nature should be communicated.

Appendix 5: Members' social media guidance

Social media: a guide for Members

1. What is 'social media'?

Social media includes online social networks and other ways in which people share content, opinions, information and ideas. They do this with text, images, audio or video. The aim is for two-way communication.

Some examples:
- Social networking sites where individuals create profiles and/ or networks such as Facebook and Nextdoor
- Blogging or microblogging sites where people write articles or short posts such as Twitter
- Sites where you can upload photos and/or videos, such as Instagram, TikTok and YouTube.

2. What are the benefits of using social media?

Social media offers huge potential to:

- **Communicate** with your constituents – both listening and getting messages out there very quickly –
  - People often have little understanding of the councillor role and may have negative perceptions: social media can give a taste of what councillors do and remind people of what you have in common;
  - Residents can be made aware of and provide feedback on your work and campaigns, including mobilising support and interest and gathering followers;
  - You can have conversations with people who do not traditionally seek out their local representatives.

- **Reach a wider audience** - local and sometimes national press will follow councillors on Twitter or Facebook, looking for news stories - each tweet or comment is effectively a mini-press release.

- **Share** useful links– put people in touch with local community groups and helpful information from beyond the borough.

- **Provide insight** – pick up valuable intelligence about local issues, interests and concerns by following local social media accounts.

- **Keep up to date** - find out about relevant news, research and innovations from outside the borough.

3. Dos and don'ts of using social media as a Member

DO:

- Show respect for others' opinions. That does not mean you cannot disagree but do so in a manner which is appropriate and consider the content of your communications carefully. Apply this test: if you wouldn't say it face-to-face, in a public meeting or in an official email, it's probably inappropriate to say online. When people express dissatisfaction about the Council you may be able to direct them to the right place to make their complaints.

- Be professional, credible, responsible, accurate and fair: you are subject to the Members' Code of Conduct when using social media in your role as a Member and your behaviour can impact negatively on the Council, your fellow Members, the Council's staff and the wider public.

- State clearly what capacity you are posting/ tweeting in – as a Member or private citizen?   This can help to provide clarity – though people may sometimes perceive you as a Member when you think you are acting privately.

- Be clear that views you publish are your own and credit others when these are the views and work of other people.

- Remember that participating online means your comments are permanently available and open to being republished in other media. Once something is posted on social media, it is difficult to retain control over how it will be used. It may be manipulated without your consent, used in different contexts, or further distributed even when you have deleted it.

- Consider how to use different platforms for different types of interactions: it is useful to indicate the aims and intended audiences of your different accounts.

- Use privacy settings if you do not want your social media to be accessed by the press or public. Read the terms of service of any social media site you use and make sure you understand their confidentiality / privacy settings. However, even the strictest settings are no guarantee that posts will remain private.

- Be aware of inappropriate comments and content posted by other people in response to your own posts. If you don't respond, or if you actively engage with those people without addressing the inappropriate content, this could be seen to

undermine trust and confidence and at worst, be taken to condone such activity (see 'Dealing with harmful rumours and misinformation' below).

- Be aware of safeguarding responsibilities because social media sites are misused by offenders. Safeguarding is everyone's business – if you have any concerns about other site users, you have a responsibility to report these. Don't share pictures of children or vulnerable adults without consent.

- Maintain the same level of vigilance on social media as you would for emails- you can be sent phishing requests and malicious software through these routes too.

DON'T:
- Feel you have to respond to posts and comments at top speed all the time. Consider establishing your own routine for responses and make people aware of this.

- Forget that not everybody is on social media: the opinions you hear may not be representative of all views. You will know your residents best - consider which channel works best for them to connect with you, online and offline.

You can find more information about online safety and digital citizenship in the guidance on Member safety in the Members' handbook.

The Local Government Association provides [guidance and tools to support councillors in their online communications, including infographics you can pin to social media profiles setting out the ways in which you intend to engage with people online.](#)

4. What are Members' responsibilities when using social media?

- **Accuracy** - Members are personally responsible for the content they publish on any form of social media. Publishing an untrue statement which is damaging to someone's reputation may lead to a defamation action for which you will be personally liable and you may have to pay damages. The same applies if you pass on any untrue statements you receive. Avoid publishing anything where there is doubt or seek permission in advance.

- **Being lawful** – libel, defamation, copyright, equalities and data protection laws all apply when using social media and you are responsible for abiding by any 'fair use' copyright policies which the social media platforms have in place. Do not publish personal data of other people, including photographs, without their

express permission to do so, and if you publish any information that is not yours, without permission, this may result in an award of damages against you.

- **Confidentiality** – the Member Code of Conduct includes clear obligations and guidance relating to confidentiality. Again, if confidential information is disclosed, this could result in claims being brought against the council or against individuals to recover any loss or damage suffered.

- **Probity in decision-making** – Members sitting on regulatory committees such as planning or licensing in particular should be aware that they are allowed to have a view, but not go so far as to have predetermined their position on a matter. Any views aired on social media could be used as evidence of making a decision in advance of hearing all relevant information. The Council's decision would then be open to legal challenge and could be invalidated.

  It can be difficult to be clear on the appropriate boundaries when you are championing an issue for residents – whether in person or on social media - and you are then required to participate in the decision-making on that issue. If in doubt about whether or not your participation in decision making is appropriate in relation to a matter, please seek advice from the Monitoring Officer before participating.

- **Good working relationships** – Members (and officers) are required to comply with the Protocol on Staff – Councillor Relations. Any concerns, comments or complaints about officers should be made through the appropriate channels and not on social media.

5. Dealing with harmful rumours and misinformation

It is difficult not to respond when you are the subject of rumours, misinformation and smear campaigns. While it is always tempting to respond and clarify every rumour and falsehood circulated about you, it is also useful to think about the emotional, economic and time costs of engaging as in many cases, rumours disappear as quickly as they emerged. You may find the following suggestions useful:

- Calmly try to understand who is behind the attack. Often, they are people with a clear agenda trying to gain control or to manipulate.

- Correct the facts. This can be done with a formal statement or if you can identify the source, then do it publicly by correcting their posts with facts and evidence.

- Remember that rumours and misinformation are fed by repetition. It is good to defend your reputation but often the most efficient way is to do it once and then stop engaging this way.

- Leave the environment in which the rumour is being spread. A smear campaign tries to manipulate and gain control but no control can be gained if you do not participate. You may wish to advise your followers that you will be logging out of social media for a period of time, which gives the rumour time to calm down while protecting your own emotional and mental wellbeing.

- Rumours and smear campaigns can be very stressful and at times, they can feel very isolating. Keep your self-confidence by talking to family, friends and others in your support network. Some may also feel able to counteract rumours with factual information.

- If you can identify the source of the rumours and smear campaigns, you should document it and keep a record. This may be useful if disciplinary, police or legal action is required.

Further information

If you have any queries or are unsure about any of the guidance contained in this document, please contact the Council's Monitoring Officer in the first instance.