

Policy and Sustainability Committee

10.00am, Tuesday, 26 November 2019

Protocol on Elected Member Personal Safety

Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 To discharge the Motion by Councillor Watt.
- 1.2 To agree the terms of the protocol outlined in paragraphs 4.6-4.11.
- 1.3 To note that the terms of this protocol will be included in a planned refresh of elected member guidance.

Andrew Kerr

Chief Executive

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Report

Protocol on Elected Member Personal Safety

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report lays out a protocol for elected members to report incidents of verbal or physical intimidation to ensure appropriate support can be provided.

3. Background

- 3.1 Council agreed a motion by Councillor Watt in May 2019 requesting that a protocol be created which would allow councillors to report incidents to the Council, so that appropriate support could be provided.

4. Main report

- 4.1 It is essential to the democratic process to allow freedom of expression and to promote debate and discussion. Moreover, this must be done in a manner which is civil, maintains the integrity of the democratic process and does not discourage people engaging in public life.
- 4.2 COSLA's advice to elected members on personal safety states that there have been very few major incidents involving violence against politicians and there are no statistics which prove that public figures are more at risk than others. However, concern has been raised both locally and nationally at the current political atmosphere and the impact on constructive debate. In addition, the rise of social media has added a new avenue for intimidating behaviour.
- 4.3 Intimidation affects people differently but can significantly affect an individual's physical and mental health. Intimidation against politicians and those working in politics undermines representative democracy, stifles debate and threatens the integrity of democratic structures. It can also discourage those who may wish to represent their community in being involved in the Council, potentially impairing the diversity and vibrancy of representative democracy.
- 4.4 It is important that the Council supports elected members and representative democracy and that it demonstrates leadership in setting the right tone for political debate. The Council reiterated its support for and the importance of respectful political debate at its meeting on 24 October 2019.

- 4.5 This protocol aims to put measures in place so that the Council and councillors are aware of the risks to personal safety and the process to follow if councillors feel threatened or in danger.
- 4.6 **Report to the Police and the Governance Team** - It is important that councillors report all threats/instances of violence or intimidation made against them. This includes abusive online and offline communications. Even if a threat is not initially thought to be serious, the incident should be reported to allow the police to assess the risk. They will investigate and ascertain if there is a danger to personal safety.
- 4.7 Councillors are asked to report the threat or act of violence or intimidation directly to Police Scotland and to report it to the Council using the Governance Team mailbox governance@edinburgh.gov.uk.
- 4.8 **Recording of the Incident** – The Council uses the SHE Assure incident reporting system to record all Health and Safety incidents. A new category has been added for elected members and the Governance Team will use this to record any threats of violence, aggression or intimidation. This will allow the Council to maintain oversight of the number of such incidents, to identify any trends which require further action and to report on the matter. Consideration of any trends will be considered through the Council's risk framework where identified risks will be escalated where appropriate to ensure action is taken where necessary.
- 4.9 **Risk Assessment** – If a councillor has been threatened then there will be consideration of the risks to that individual's personal safety. Police Scotland will undertake this as part of their investigation and they will advise the councillor accordingly. The Council will also undertake a risk assessment of Council activities with the councillor. This may include, for instance, changing their route to work or ensuring that surgeries are held in staffed buildings. A meeting will be organised with the Council's security manager to discuss these risks with the councillor.
- 4.10 **Support** – The Council has an employee assistance programme which provides support and guidance, staffed by experienced and professional advisors. PAM Assist provides access to professional expertise and the option to talk about a range of work and personal issues including the effects of any threat of violence.
- 4.11 **Training** – Police Scotland carried out training on elected member safety in early 2019 and training on this subject will now be included as a key component of the induction programme for new councillors.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 If approved this protocol will take immediate effect and will be written into new elected member guidance which will also cover remuneration, expenses and the support services available to councillors.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 There are no financial implications as a result of this report.

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 This subject has been added to the Strategy and Communications risk register and will be managed through the Council's risk framework.
- 7.2 Consultation on this protocol has taken place with Police Scotland and the Council will continue to work with the Police on this subject.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 [Act of Council No 28 of 30 May 2019.](#)
- 8.2 [COSLA/LGIU Elected Member Personal Safety Guidance](#)

9. Appendices

None