

THE PERSONAL SAFETY OF MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL WHEN MEETING WITH MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Officer Contact

Khalid Ahmed, Central Services

Papers with report

Appendix A – Scoping Report

REASON FOR ITEM

To consider recommendations from a review which the Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy Overview Committee undertook at its meeting held on 16 March 2011, which looked at the Personal Safety of Members of the Council when meeting with members of the public, at the Civic Centre and at Ward Surgeries.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That Whips welcome the findings of the review and give consideration to the following recommendations:

- (i) Consideration be given to ensuring that the front doors of the Civic Centre are locked outside normal working hours and after the last meeting in the building has finished, but that a door bell be available for members of the public to use in cases of emergencies.**
- (ii) The Group Offices' Secretariat be asked to ensure that where possible all meeting rooms for Members meeting with their constituents and / or members of the public be booked in the Civic Centre's main reception area's meeting rooms, where there is a security presence.**
- (iii) The Group Offices' Secretariat be provided with a list of those rooms within the Civic Centre that have panic alarm buttons fitted.**
- (iv) The Head of Facilities Management be asked to ensure that a list of emergency security telephone numbers, including out of hours first aiders be displayed in all meeting rooms within the Civic Centre. This list also be supplied to the Group Offices' Secretariat and to all Members of the Council for their information.**
- (v) That officers be asked to look at putting a process in place to ensure that the names of members of the public who are on the Restricted Persons Register is made available to Members of the Council and the Group Offices' Secretariat, to ensure that Members of the Council are not put under any risk when meeting with members of the public.**
- (vi) From a personal safety perspective, all Members of the Council be advised that where possible, all Ward Surgeries be held in Council buildings and establishments, during operating hours, to ensure there was a security presence.**
- (vii) The Group Offices' Secretariat be asked to inform all Members that security staff can be contacted if they required escorting to the Members' Car Park after attending an evening meeting at the Civic Centre.**

- (viii) That Members of the Council be advised of the options which are available to them in terms of the telephone contact details they provide on the Council's public website.**
- (ix) That a workshop be provided for Members on personal safety and officers be asked to produce a protocol on Members' personal safety based on the findings of the review.**

Information

1. The Corporate Services & Partnerships Policy Overview at its meeting on 16 March 2011 undertook a review into the security measures which were currently in place for Members of the Council when they held meetings on their own with members of the public at the Civic Centre and at their Ward Surgeries.
2. As Whips will recall, discussion took place on Members' personal safety at the Whips Meeting held on 22 February 2011. Whips were asked to contact their Members to advise that meetings with members of the public be held in the meeting rooms located in the Civic Centre's Main Reception.

Reason for the Review

3. The personal safety of local politicians is important to ensure that members of the public are given access to meeting their local elected Councillor. Recently there have been incidents where Members of the Council have been threatened by members of the public. The review looked at the present internal security measures which the Council has in place to safeguard the personal safety of Members when they met members of the public on their own, both at the Civic Centre and at Ward Surgeries. The Head of Facilities Management attended the meeting and provided advice and guidance to Members during the review.

Background

4. The safety of local politicians has recently been brought to light with the recent events in Arizona, United States where a Congresswoman, Gabrielle Giffords was shot when meeting with her constituents. Stephen Timms, MP for East Ham was stabbed in May 2010, at a Constituency surgery by one of his constituents.
5. These incidents and others have highlighted the vulnerability some times, of local politicians meeting their constituents and members of the public on their own. It is therefore important that Members' personal safety is not compromised whilst carrying out their duties as elected representatives of the community.
6. The review also looked at the personal safety of Members outside of the Civic Centre, in view of the recent harassment of a Member of the Council who has been receiving inappropriate text messages to her mobile phone. The review discussed the personal data such as telephone numbers which Members of the Council provided on the public website.

Security Services

7. The review was informed that the main objective of the Security Services of the Council is to ensure the security and safety of the civic centre, the staff who work here and the visitors to the building, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

8. The Council's new security contractor, MJF Corporate Guarding Limited began the new security contract on 14 March 2011 but there have been no visible changes to the service provided. There are 12 security staff who are all experienced in terms of providing the security services within the Civic Centre.
9. Other services which security staff carried out are First Aid cover in the absence of the occupational health nurse i.e. out of hours, the security supervision for problematic interviews, key holding and alarm response service for schools and other LBH premises.
10. The Head of Facilities Management reported that Security Services is primarily a front of house service based in the main reception area of the Council's Civic Centre. Other areas within the civic centre that are staffed during office hours by the security team are housing needs reception, Children's Reception, the members and multi storey civic centre car parks.
11. The review was provided with details of the full security rota for operations within the Civic Centre and in theory the Civic Offices are open to the public until the last meeting within the building had finished. However, there is a security presence throughout the night at the main reception to the Civic Centre as there are occasions in an emergency when members of the public turn up at the Council offices seeking advice.
12. Members questioned the logic of allowing members of the public to gain access to the Civic Centre at all hours and the possible security implications of this and asked that consideration be given to locking the main reception doors and having a doorbell for members of the public to use in case of emergencies.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Consideration be given to ensuring that the front doors of the Civic Centre are locked outside normal working hours and after the last meeting in the building has finished, but that a door bell be available for members of the public to use in cases of emergencies.

13. As earlier mentioned, the review was provided with details of where the security cover is concentrated within the Civic Centre. The review found that unless Security Services is given prior warning of the potential for a disturbance at a meeting, there is no security cover in Phase II of the Civic Centre. Both Group Offices are situated in Phase II, and this is an area of the Civic Centre where Members met with constituents on their own.
14. The Head of Facilities Management provided the review with details of the meeting rooms within the Group Office area and their appropriateness for Members to hold meetings with individuals on their own. The review was informed that his advice is that Members should not use the Group Offices, but should use the meeting rooms in the Civic Centre Reception area, where there is a permanent security presence.
15. The review was informed that the Labour Group Members within the Council have been recently advised by the Group Secretariat that they should meet with constituents they did not know, in the meeting rooms adjacent to the Civic Centre Reception area, where they would be visible and close to security. The review asked that this general instruction be communicated to all Members of the Council.

Members of the Public and Access to the Civic Centre

16. The review received information regarding members of the public arriving at the Civic Centre for meetings with Members of the Council, particularly in Phase II of the Civic Whips Meeting – 10 May 2011

Centre. Security Services are not always made aware of these meetings and this creates a security problem as there have been occasions where members of the public have simply been allowed access to the Civic Centre without the knowledge of both Security Services and the Member concerned.

17. If Members did hold all their meetings with members of the public in the Main Reception area, members of the public will have to wait in this area until the Member arrived for the meeting. This will improve safety and stop incidents of unknown persons wandering around the Civic Centre. Better communication was needed between the Member and the Group Offices' Secretariat, and Security Services to ensure that all are aware of who is in the Civic Centre. This could be included in the proposed Members' Protocol on Personal Safety.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

The Group Offices' Secretariat be asked to ensure that where possible all meeting rooms for Members meeting with their constituents and / or members of the public be booked in the Civic Centre's main reception area's meeting rooms, where there is a security presence.

18. The Head of Facilities Management also informed the review that there are meeting rooms within the Civic Centre which are fitted with panic alarm buttons and where possible Members should use these rooms for their meetings.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

The Group Offices' Secretariat be provided with a list of those rooms within the Civic Centre that have panic alarm buttons fitted.

Emergency Security Telephone Numbers

19. The review discussed the availability of security in the cases of emergency and the need for the emergency security telephone numbers to be displayed in all meeting rooms and for these telephone numbers to be easily available for all Members of the Council. The Head of Facilities Management agreed that these emergency telephone numbers should also include the telephone numbers of those security staff who provided first aid cover in the absence of the occupational health nurse and the designated first aiders (i.e. out of hours).

RECOMMENDATION 4:

The Head of Facilities Management be asked to ensure that a list of emergency security telephone numbers, including out of hours first aiders be displayed in all meeting rooms within the Civic Centre. This list also be supplied to the Group Offices' Secretariat and to all Members of the Council for their information.

Restricted Persons Register

20. The London Borough of Hillingdon has a duty to give information to its employees on any risks that they may encounter in the course of their duties including where there is evidence that a member of the public may become violent or abusive. This information is contained on the Restricted Persons Register and is managed by the Occupational

Health & Safety Services and is accessible to Council employees (and Members of the Council) in relation to their work activities, via the Council's intranet, Horizon.

21. The review agreed that a process should be put in place to ensure that Members of the Council did not jeopardise their personal safety by inadvertently meeting with members of the public who are on this register.

RECOMMENDATION 5:

That officers be asked to look at putting a process in place to ensure that the names of members of the public who are on the Restricted Persons Register is made available to Members of the Council and the Group Offices' Secretariat, to ensure that Members of the Council are not put under any risk when meeting with members of the public.

Ward Surgeries

22. The review also considered Members' safety at the various Ward Surgeries which are held throughout the Borough. The review was provided with the full list of Ward Surgeries and the majority of these tended to be held in public places such as libraries, community centres, the one-stop shop or at the Civic Centre.
23. Venues for Ward Surgeries are arranged by Members and by the Groups themselves. The review heard that the Labour Group Members have recently been advised that they should not attend a Ward Surgery on their own, and most of the Group adhered to this.
24. The Councillors' Support and Development Manager informed the review that female Councillors are advised that when they are meeting on their own with one of their constituents, that from a personal safety perspective, that they be accompanied by another Councillor.

RECOMMENDATION 6:

From a personal safety perspective, all Members of the Council be advised that where possible, all Ward Surgeries be held in Council buildings and establishments, during operating hours, to ensure there was a security presence.

Members' Car Park

25. The review was informed that the security service also extended to the Members' Car Park, where on occasions individual Members have felt vulnerable, particularly after attending evening meetings. The Head of Facilities Management reported that security staff if contacted could escort lone Members of the Council to their cars to ensure their safety. The review agreed that this offer should be communicated to all Members.

RECOMMENDATION 7:

The Group Offices' Secretariat be asked to inform all Members that security staff can be contacted if they required escorting to the Members' Car Park after attending an evening meeting at the Civic Centre.

Members' Personal Telephone Numbers

26. The review was made aware of a current situation where a female Member of the Council was receiving pestering text messages from a member of the public. The Council's website contains contact details for all Members of the Council, including telephone numbers. It is an individual's personal choice which telephone number they wished to be published on the website.
27. Many Members merely provided the telephone number of their Group Offices and this was a good option to ensure personal telephone numbers were not abused. It was noted that the vast majority of members of the public who telephoned Members either on their home or mobile telephones, were genuine callers, who were seeking advice from their Ward Councillors.
28. The review noted that some Members have Council telephone lines in their homes which they used for Council business. An option could be for Members to make this telephone number available to the public, if not already done so. Officers were asked to investigate the feasibility of doing this.

RECOMMENDATION 8:

That Members of the Council be advised of the options which are available to them in terms of the telephone contact details they provide on the Council's public website.

Member Training and Protocol

29. Reference was made to a workshop which had taken place following last May's Local Elections. This had provided guidance to Members on how to deal with conflict resolution when meeting with constituents. The review asked that to reinforce this message, a workshop be provided for Members on personal safety.
30. Subject to the approval of Whips of the methods and approaches which have been suggested in this review, officers could be asked to produce a protocol for Members on security and their safety when meeting with members of the public.

RECOMMENDATION 9:

That a workshop be provided for Members on personal safety and officers be asked to produce a protocol on Members' personal safety based on the findings of the review.

Conclusions

31. Overall the security measures which are in place are good and provide Members of the Council with a sufficiently safe environment in which to carry out their duties as Councillors. The recommendations of the review will provide added protection to Members and also remind Members of the need to consider their own personal safety when carrying out their duties as Councillors.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Scoping Report for the Review (**Appendix A**)

**CORPORATE SERVICES & PARTNERSHIPS
POLICY OVERVIEW COMMITTEE**

2010/11

REVIEW SCOPING REPORT**Review title:****The Personal Safety of Members of the Council when meeting with members of the public****Aim of the review**

To review the security measures which are in place to ensure the safety of Members of the Council when meeting members of the public at the Council Offices at the Civic Centre and at political party surgery venues.

Proposed outcome

A report summarising the Committee's findings would be completed and presented to the Whips. The report will examine the present procedures and arrangements which are in place to ensure the safety and well being of Members of the Council when meeting members of the public and will make recommendations on improvements that can be made simply and hopefully without cost.

Terms of reference

1. To look at the existing security measures and procedures which are in place both within the Civic Centre and at Members surgeries to ensure the safety of Members.
2. To examine the role of security staff within the Civic Centre, particularly in relation to providing security in meeting rooms away from the main reception of the Civic Centre.
3. To look at the procedures which are in place by the London Borough of Hillingdon to effectively manage and respond to violence and aggression within the Civic Centre.
4. To examine the advice and training that Members receive in relation to dealing with members of the public on their own.
5. To examine what systems are in place to provide information to both Members and staff of the London Borough of Hillingdon on those people who have been identified by the Council, as posing a risk to the safety of individuals.
6. To look at the Risk Assessment procedures which are in place in order to assess the potential likelihood of complaints or situation compromise arising.
7. To examine the security procedures which are in place at Ward Surgeries and to assess if there are any gaps in procedures which could put individuals at risk.
8. To make recommendations to Cabinet if necessary, on what the Council can do in relation to improving security measures and advice given to Members and officers.

9. To promote good practice, the do's, the don't and what to do if an event arises.

Reasons for the review

The personal safety of local politicians and officers is important to ensure that members of the public are given access to meeting Members of the Council within the Civic Centre.

The safety of local politicians has recently been brought to light with the recent events in Arizona, United States where a Congresswoman, Gabrielle Giffords was shot when meeting with her constituents.

Stephen Timms, Member of Parliament for East Ham, was stabbed in May 2010, at a Constituency surgery by one of his constituents.

The recent issue of a Member of this Council being stalked.

The internal security measures which the London Borough of Hillingdon has in place to safeguard the personal safety of Members need to be assessed to ensure that people are not put at risk when carrying out their duties.

Security Services

The main objective of the Security services of the Council is to ensure the security and safety of the civic centre, the staff who work here and the visitors to the building, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

It is primarily a front of house service based in the main reception area. Other areas within the civic centre that are staffed during office hours by the security team are housing needs reception, social services mezzanine reception, the members and multi storey civic centre car parks and the asylum team based at Weir House.

Other services which security staff carry out are:

- First aid cover in the absence of the occupational health nurse i.e. out of hours.
- Security supervision for problematic interviews.
- Keyholding and alarm response service for schools and other LBH premises.
- Security services including mobile patrols, personal security officers, security teams for short or long term contracts and dog patrols can also be arranged for events outside the civic centre.

Key issues

1. What are the arrangements which are currently in place for Members of the Council when they meet with members of the public within the Civic Centre?
2. Are Security staff within the Civic Centre made aware of all meetings (in all parts of the Civic Centre) which Members of the Council have with members of the public?
3. What training and guidance are Members of the Council given on their personal safety when holding meetings in private with members of the public?
4. Are all meeting rooms within the Civic Centre safe and secure environments for meetings to be held with members of the public?

5. What are the levels and numbers of security staff within the Civic Centre and have they easy and quick access to all meeting rooms?
6. How is the information on the Restricted Persons Register communicated to ensure that Members of the Council are aware of members of the public who have previously become verbally or physically abusive to Council staff?
7. What to do in the event of a problem.
8. What are the arrangements for security at Ward Surgeries?

Methodology

The review will consider evidence from the Council's Facilities Manager and from the personal experiences Members of this Committee have had.

Stakeholders and consultation plan

The review could consult with all Members of the Council to look at potential gaps in security which exists which could leave individuals vulnerable.

Proposed timeframe & milestones

Meeting	Action	Comments
16 March 2011	Consideration of scoping report and review	Steve Smith – Facilities Manager as witness