

Winterbourne Stoke Parish Council

Harassment Policy

Winterbourne Stoke Parish Council views harassment as a very serious issue and this policy lays out our response to it. This is currently based on advice received from the Local Government Association and may be revised when the National Association of Local Councils makes its own recommendations

1. Introduction

1.1 An important role of a councillor is to keep in touch with their residents and communities. This includes helping individuals with any problems they might have. Often this extends 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.

1.2 Councillors are encouraged to:

- assess the risks to personal in carrying out their 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, the purchase of 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

1.3 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.

1.4 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.

2. Dealing with a Variety of Behaviours

2.1 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.

2.2 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 Winterbourne Stoke Parish Council know about the incident. You can decide if you want to inform the police.

2.3 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.

3. Home Visits

3.1 Parish Councillors do sometimes visit parishioners 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.

3.2 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.

3.3 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
- 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.

3.4 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 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

- take a 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.

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

3.6 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.

4. Personal Callers to Councillors' Private Homes

4.1 Most councillors seek to maintain a balance between their personal and public lives. Being a small village, Parish Councillors know most of the parishioners and vice versa. Some may be close friends and regular visitors to your home. That said, it is wise to separate personal and parish council business.

4.2 If a visit is to take place at your private home relating to council business, it is recommended that this only takes place via a pre-arranged appointment, ideally with another person in support

4.3 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.

4.4 Try to ascertain the nature of the issue they want to discuss, conducting any discussion outside the house.

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

4.6 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 only be resorted to if you want evidence for the police.

4.7 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.

4.8 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.

4.9 The use of reasonable force to protect yourself and your home can be a last resort.

5. Reporting incidents

5.1 If you consider any incident of harassment to be severe, contact the police immediately. Even if an incident is not considered serious enough to involve the police, it should always be reported to Winterbourne Stoke Parish Council. Alleged acts of violence should always be

reported to the police by the individual affected and **will** always be reported by Winterbourne Stoke Parish Council as a duty of care issue.

5.2 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.