

## Personal safety guidance for elected members

### 1. Recognising warning signs

Whenever you are out and about visiting or canvassing alone, you should be alive to the potential risks presented by those who may be under the influence of alcohol or drugs, have mental health conditions, or where dangerous animals may be present. The main hazards are:

- Risk of verbal attack
- Injury from physical attack
- Being held against your will
- Attack from animals
- Sudden illness
- Accidents - Slips, trips and falls
- Risk of false accusations

A useful approach to assessing risk to your personal safety is to think about the three primary elements that contribute to personal safety (People, Environment, Task). When lone working, don't forget your PET!

### 2. Preparing for canvassing / visits

- Plan your work. Let others know your route and what time you expect to end.
- Dress appropriately and wear flat or low heeled shoes or boots which will not inhibit you if you need to run.
- Avoid drawing attention to yourself and be as inconspicuous as possible if visiting or canvassing alone. If the intention is to be conspicuous it is advisable to conduct visits or canvassing in pairs or groups.
- Look confident and be alert to your surroundings.
- Avoid carrying a personal bag or handbag.
- When it is dark, stay in well-lit areas and ensure you have a torch. Avoid poorly lit underpasses or short cuts.
- Carry a mobile phone, and ensure it is fully charged and readily accessible

### 3. Canvassing and in surgeries

Fear manifests itself in both a mental and physical reaction. If you start to feel uneasy, you are probably picking up danger or warning signals. Assess the situation by asking yourself:

- Is the person's anger directed at me?
- Are they upset rather than angry?

## Appendix 3

- Do I feel in danger? If you do, leave and seek help immediately.

Do not underestimate someone's hostility. Do not respond aggressively. Aggression increases the likelihood of confrontation.

Stay calm. Do not raise your voice. Speak clearly and slowly. Avoid being drawn into an argument. Try to talk the problem through and aim to placate the person and avoid aggressive body language, e.g. crossed arms, hands on hips, pointing - these tend to incite anger. Try to use open gestures, keeping your palms facing upwards.

**Remember if you feel in danger at any time – WITHDRAW from the situation and retreat to a position of safety.**

- **When walking** - Always take the safe route on paths where other people are around. Do not take short cuts and always use recognised pedestrian crossings.
- **When parking** – Park your bicycle or vehicle in a well-lit area and if possible, in such a manner to ensure you can cycle or drive away unimpeded. If parking in a dead-end street or cul-de-sac, face the exit.
- **Going into peoples' homes / premises** – Make sure you notify colleagues where you are going and how long you are likely to be.
  - Be alert to dangers and always introduce yourself and explain the reason for your visit.
  - Do not continue speaking to the person if they are inappropriately dressed.
  - If you meet someone in an enclosed space, stay near the exit door, if possible. Make sure you know how to get out in an emergency.
  - If you are concerned, retreat.
  - If there are dogs, ask the owner for the dog(s) to be shut in another room. Do not enter any home / premise if the dog(s) are exhibiting signs of aggression.
- **Dealing with Aggression / Violence** – Keep your distance, never touch or turn your back on someone who is angry. Never put your hands up as this can be seen as an act of aggression, try to escape immediately and get to a place of safety where you know there will be people.

### 4. Further resources

The Suzy Lamplugh Trust is a recognized organisation, where further information can be found about lone working and personal safety

<https://www.suzylamplugh.org/> in addition to the Health and Safety Executive  
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/toolbox/workers/lone.htm>