

# **Councillors in Edinburgh are to be offered personal safety alarms**

## **Councillors in Edinburgh are to be offered personal safety alarms amid fears over attacks and abuse.**

It comes as the council seeks to implement recommendations from the Jo Cox Civility Commission aimed at tackling abuse and intimidation towards elected representatives.

The council recently signed a five-year contract for safety alarms, initially intended for council employees in lone working situations. But now the offer will be extended to councillors who can face threats both online and in-person.

Council leader Cammy Day said there was “further work” needed on councillor safety and added his colleague had an experience which the police had get involved with.

The Commission, established by the Jo Cox foundation in honour of the Batley and Spen MP who was murdered in 2016 outside a library where she was about to hold a constituency surgery, has proposed a range of recommendations across different sectors aimed at tackling abuse and intimidation towards elected representatives.

It’s recommendations to councils were to improve risk planning for abuse at council meetings and other events, pass motions affirming principles to address abuse and model good behaviour, and ensure security and well-being resources are available.

A report by the Jo Cox Foundation published earlier this year warned abuse and intimidation of politicians had become a “significant threat to democracy”. It said there was a direct correlation between the rise of social media and how easy it has become to abuse representatives.

Edinburgh Council said the nature of the constituency and local ward work undertaken by elected members, which often takes place outside of council-owned venues whilst being alone, “means that no set of processes or mitigations can fully remove the risk of attack upon individuals”.

Therefore, officials added in a report tabled at the policy and sustainability committee on Tuesday, October 22, elected members “should continue to be vigilant, ensure that they have read the guidance and information available, and report any concerns they have to officers for further assessment and action where this is feasible”.

Personal alarms for all 63 city councillors this would cost up to £6,000 a year depending on the type of device.

At the meeting, Greens councillor June Bandel said: “It would be useful for the council to explore if we could get some of that training to make us feel more equipped to deal with situations when emotions run high.

“Some councillors are already organising their surgeries around whether there is staff or other groups and organisations present at the time and place the surgery is held. It would be good to get guidance.”

Council leader Cammy Day said: “I think there needs to be further work done, all of us hold local surgeries in different parts of our communities, to make sure that we’re safe.

“One of my colleagues has had experiences in the east of the city where she’s had to have the police involved.”

The report said: "In April 2024, the council entered into a five-year contract for lone-working alarms that could be provided to individuals.

"Whilst the purpose of the contract was aimed predominantly at council employees who find themselves in a lone working situation, the technology could be utilised for elected members."

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter