



<u>Committee and Date</u>	<u>Item</u>
Audit Committee 23 rd June 2016	

2015/2016 Review of Whistleblowing - ‘Speaking Up About Wrongdoing’

Responsible Officer Michele Leith, Head of HR&D

e-mail: Michele.leith@shropshire.gov.uk

Tel: 01743 254402

1. Summary

The Whistleblowing process provides arrangements to enable employees, elected members, contractors and others to raise concerns about fraud, corruption, adult/child protection or harassment and bullying allegations.

This report provides an update to the Shropshire Council Audit Committee on the number of cases raised regarding Council employees over the last year (excluding school based employees).

2. Recommendations

The Audit Committee is asked to:

- a. Consider and comment on the contents of the report.

REPORT

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 3.1 The Council has in place an effective Counter Fraud, Bribery and Anti-Corruption Strategy. The Council proactively encourages the detection of fraud and irregularities and the appropriate management of them. The Whistleblowing policies contribute to our zero tolerance of fraud, bribery and corruption.
- 3.2 The recommendations contained in this report are compatible with the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998. There are no direct environmental, equalities, consultation or climate change consequences of this proposal.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 The management and investigation of issues raised in response to this policy are met from approved budgets.

5. Background

- 5.1 This is an annual report to Audit Committee on whistleblowing arrangements.
- 5.2 The Whistleblowing Policy is available to all staff via the Intranet pages and is also available to them, along with members, contractors, partners and the public, via the website; allowing it to be accessed from any computer. This is particularly important as it allows staff to access the policy outside of a work environment, where they may be reluctant to be seen accessing the Whistleblowing policy.

Whistleblowing is when a worker reports suspected wrongdoing at work. Officially this is called ‘making a disclosure in the public interest’.

A worker can report things that aren’t right, are illegal or if anyone at work is neglecting their duties, including:

- someone’s health and safety is in danger
- damage to the environment
- a criminal offence
- the company isn’t obeying the law (like not having the right insurance)
- covering up wrongdoing

The way a worker can ‘blow the whistle’ on wrongdoing depends on whether they feel they can tell their employer.

1. The worker should check their employment contract or ask human resources or personnel if their company has a whistleblowing procedure.
2. If they feel they can, they should contact their employer about the issue they want to report.
3. If they can’t tell their employer, they should contact a prescribed person or body.

A worker can only tell the prescribed person or body if they think their employer:

- will cover it up
- would treat them unfairly if they complained
- hasn’t sorted it out and they’ve already told them

Dismissals and whistleblowing

A worker can’t be dismissed because of whistleblowing. If they are, they can claim unfair dismissal - they’ll be protected by law as long as certain criteria are met.

Types of whistleblowing eligible for protection

These are called ‘qualifying disclosures’. They include when someone reports:

- that someone’s health and safety is in danger
- damage to the environment
- a criminal offence
- that the company isn’t obeying the law (like not having the right insurance)
- that someone’s covering up wrongdoing

Who is protected

The following people are protected:

- employees
- agency workers
- people that are training with an employer, but not employed
- self-employed workers, if supervised or working off-site

You’re also protected if you work in a school or sixth-form college, whether you’re an employee or an agency worker.

NHS workers who work under certain contractual arrangements, e.g. certain GPs and dentists, are also protected.

A worker will be eligible for protection if:

- they honestly think what they’re reporting is true
- they think they’re telling the right person
- they believe that their disclosure is in the public interest

Who isn’t protected

Workers aren’t protected from dismissal if:

- they break the law when they report something, e.g. they signed the Official Secrets Act
- they found out about the wrongdoing when someone wanted legal advice (‘legal professional privilege’), e.g. if they’re a solicitor

Workers who aren’t employees can’t claim unfair dismissal because of whistleblowing, but they are protected and can claim ‘detrimental treatment’.

Tribunals

Workers dismissed for whistleblowing can go to an employment tribunal or an industrial tribunal in Northern Ireland.

If the tribunal decides the employee has been unfairly dismissed, it will order that they are:

- reinstated (get their job back)
- paid compensation

A tribunal judge can reduce any compensation awarded by 25% if they find the person has acted dishonestly.

A whistleblower who is bullied at work will also be able to bring a claim to the employment tribunal against their employer or colleagues.

Whistleblowing abroad

Workers are protected from unfair treatment even if they blow the whistle on something that happened abroad. This includes when a different country’s law has been or will be broken.

5.3 In 2015/16, there was one case relating to employees reported under the whistleblowing arrangements for Shropshire Council.

2015/16 Whistleblowing Reports

Route in	Allegation	Procedure Used	Outcome
Verbal	Breach of Trust and Confidence and misuse of Council IT equipment	Disciplinary	Employees left by mutual agreement
Verbal	Theft	Audit Investigation	No case to answer
Verbal	Harassment	Audit Investigation	No case to answer
Verbal	Employment Breach	Audit Investigation	No case to answer
In person	Corruption	Audit Investigation	Vexatious complainant
Verbal	Corruption	Audit Investigation	Vexatious complainant
Written	Benefit Fraud	Referral to SFIS*	Case with SFIS
Verbal	Corruption	Audit Investigation	No case to answer
Verbal	Corruption	Audit Investigation	No case to answer
Verbal	Corruption	Audit Investigation	No case to answer

*Single Fraud Investigation Service which replaced Housing in May 2015

6. Comparison to previous years

6.1 There have been a greater number of incidents reported than in the preceding years. In 2014/15 there were two cases reported.

2015/16 had a much higher level than in previous years however in all but two cases, the outcome was that there was no case to answer or a vexatious complaint.

7. Conclusion

7.1 The ‘Speaking up about Wrongdoing’ process forms a key element of the Council’s Corporate Governance arrangements and is continuing to be a route employees use to raise concerns, as well as a route which is also open to elected members, contractors, partners and others.

List of background papers (This MUST be completed for all reports but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information) – None

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder) Malcolm Pate (Leader of the Council) and Tim Barker (Chair of Audit Committee)

Local Member- N/A
