

Audit and Governance Committee
Annual Review of Whistleblowing Policy

Date: 22 January 2021

Agenda Item:

Title of Report	Annual Review of Whistleblowing Policy
Purpose of Report	To review activity under the Council's Whistleblowing Policy
Recommendations	That Audit and Governance Committee notes the information provided in this report and supports the commitment to undertaking a self-assessment against the Protect Best Practice framework.
Officer Contact	Rob Ayliffe Monitoring Officer Tel: 01452 328506
Key Risks	Failure in corporate governance which could lead to service, financial or reputational damage to the council

Introduction

1. The Council's Whistleblowing Policy was introduced in its current form in 2017. It applies to all of the Council's workforce, including those who are employed by external agencies with whom the Council contracts. It sets out the arrangements by which employees can raise concerns about something which **affects other people** including issues of health and safety, fraud, corruption, malpractice or maladministration.
2. In order to ensure that the Council follows best practice in relation to Whistleblowing, GCC maintains a subscription with an independent charity - Protect (formerly Public Concern at Work) – who offer advice, support, training and benchmarking services.
3. The whistleblowing policy allows concerns to be raised at 3 levels:
 - Level 1- In the first instance, employees are encouraged to raise concerns with their line manager or team leader
 - Level 2 - If they feel unable to do this, they can raise the matter with any of the following: their Head of Service, Assistant Director, Director or Executive Director; the Chief Internal Auditor; the Head of Human Resources; the Assistant Director of Legal Services; (in the case of schools) the Director of Education.
 - Level 3 - If concerns remain, or are so serious that the individual does not want to discuss them with any of the above, they can be raised directly with the Monitoring Officer.
4. Whistleblowing concerns can be raised face-to-face, by email or anonymously via a form on the Council's website.
5. The Monitoring Officer also has overall responsibility for the Whistleblowing policy and its implementation. This Committee has responsibility for reviewing it annually.

Whistleblowing Activity during 2020

6. Whistleblowing activity has remained at a broadly similar level to previous years. In all, 22 whistleblowing allegations were received at level 3 during 2020. On initial assessment, five could not be investigated under the Whistleblowing policy for the following reasons:
 - Two were complaints against Academies about issues over which the council has no jurisdiction.

- One was a complaint about the outcome of an interview process, so was dealt with through the Council's grievance process
- One was a request for information by a member of the public that was already being dealt with under the Council's Request Management process.
- One was about a historic grievance concerning a member of staff. This had been investigated at the time but had found no evidence to support the allegations.

7. The remaining 16 cases break down as follows:

- Three were about **Children and Families**. Only one was found to have some substance, and was dealt with appropriately. Another is still under investigation. The remaining case was found to have no substance.
- Five were about specific **schools**. One related to serious concerns that are being dealt with appropriately. Three are still under investigation, but one of which is of a relatively minor nature. The final case was found to be without substance.
- One was about **Corporate Resources** but was found to have no substance.
- Three were about **Economy, Environment and Infrastructure** teams. One had substance but the concern was already known and action being taken. The second was without substance. The third was raised anonymously and insufficient detail was provided to be able to follow it up.
- Five were about **Fire and Rescue**. In one case, allegations were investigated and appropriate action was taken. Two of the cases related to historic allegations that had already been dealt with. One was found to have no substance. The final case is under investigation.

8. The majority of concerns were raised anonymously (12 out of the 16 that were investigated). In one case, the individual identified themselves but asked that their details were not passed on. In the remaining eleven cases, no contact details were provided at all, making it impossible to request additional further information or clarify the nature of the concern.

9. In the majority of cases, the nature of concerns raised also followed a similar pattern to previous years. In two cases, the concerns related to the implementation of COVID safe measures in particular settings. When investigated, neither was found to have substance.

10. During National Fraud Awareness Week, the opportunity was taken to promote the Whistleblowing Policy through the Council's TalkSmart bulleting to all staff.

Plans for 2021

11. Protect offer a framework of Best Practice in Whistleblowing against which members can benchmark their practice in three core areas: Governance, Staff Engagement and Operations. A self-assessment is planned to take place during 2021, the results of which will be reported to the committee once completed. This will be used as the basis for developing further actions.

ENDS