

WHISTLEBLOWING: ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE POLICY & PROCEDURE

(Report by the Audit & Risk Manager)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In response to the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA), a whistleblowing policy and procedure was introduced in February 2000. It allows any employee, contractor or member of the public the opportunity to report, without fear of victimisation, a serious or sensitive concern (e.g. a potential fraud or corrupt act, any danger to health and safety or the mistreatment or abuse of any customers, particularly children).
- 1.2 The whistleblowing policy and guidance are reviewed annually to ensure they continue to be fit for purpose.

2. ANNUAL REVIEW

- 2.1 To mark 10 years of the PIDA, Public Concern At Work (a charity whose primary purpose is to ensure that genuine concerns about wrongdoing in the workplace are raised and dealt with constructively) and the BSI British Standards published a Code of Practice on Whistleblowing Arrangements.
- 2.2 The Code sets out good practice for the introduction, revision, operation and review of effective whistleblowing arrangements. A best practice checklist is included in the Code and this has been used as the basis of this review.
- 2.3 Whilst a small number of changes are being proposed to the guidance, no changes are proposed to the policy itself. The policy and guidance notes are attached at Annexes A and B with the proposed changes highlighted.
- 2.4 After reviewing the Code, changes have also been made to the whistleblowing intranet pages. The changes encourage employees to talk to their line manager about their concerns and reiterate the point that victimisation or harassment of any employee who raises a concern will not be tolerated. It has also been made clear that any employee who knowingly raises a concern maliciously will be dealt with in accordance with the Council's disciplinary procedures.

3. PUBLICITY AND MATTERS RAISED

- 3.1 Employees and customers have a number of ways to raise whistleblowing concerns. These include an internet form, a specific email address and dedicated 24 hour telephone. District Wide is used to publicise whistleblowing together with posters that are distributed both inside and outside the Council.

3.2 7 concerns have been received through the various whistleblowing reporting channels.

- 3 related to housing or council tax benefit claims
- 1 was concerning with a motor trader
- 1 was concerned with a housing matter
- 1 was concerned with the misuse of the internet from a public use computer
- 1 was referred to the County Council.

3 of the concerns were made anonymously.

3.3 All of the items reported referred to service delivery issues. None have questioned the honesty or integrity of Council staff. All the concerns have been reported to the relevant manager.

3.4 An equality impact assessment is due to be completed on the whistleblowing policy by March 2009. Any changes required to the policy following that assessment will be reported to the Panel.

4. RECOMMENDATION

4.1 It is recommended that the Panel

- note that the annual review has been undertaken; and
- agree to the changes to the guidance note.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Whistleblowing Policy & Procedure

Whistleblowing allegations received

PAS 1998:2008 Whistleblowing Arrangements Code of Practice

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