

Huntingdonshire District Council Guidance for Whistleblowers

Introduction

This guidance explains how the Council will react when it receives a concern under its whistleblowing policy. You can read the Council's whistleblowing policy on its website or request a copy from the Director of Central Services. His telephone number is listed at the end of this note.

We realise that for some individuals it will take a great deal of courage to raise a concern. Please be assured that your concern will be treated in confidence at all times and that we will not tolerate the victimisation of anyone who reports an issue to us.

Concerns received will probably require different responses. This guidance is intended to provide you with an idea of the steps we will generally follow when a concern is received.

The guidance applies to all employees, suppliers, contractors and members of the public who wish to raise a serious or sensitive concern about a potential criminal offence, breach of the law, health and safety or environmental issue.

What you need to tell us

If you have a concern then please raise it with us sooner rather than later. We would much rather be told about a concern and investigate it, even if the investigation shows your concern was unfounded, than not know about the matter in the first place.

It is best if your concern is raised in writing and that you provide your name and some contact information. A telephone number is sufficient.

When you first raise your concern we will treat it in good faith and accept that it is true. You should however try and avoid making your concern anonymously. If your concern is justified, but made anonymously, we may still be unable to investigate it if we can't contact you to obtain further information. Please think carefully about remaining anonymous.

You need to tell us as much as you can about your concern. Please try and provide some background information and all the names, dates and places that are relevant. If you have any documentary evidence to support your concern then please tell us about that as well. The more information you are able to provide the easier it will be for us to investigate your concern.

If you are uneasy about putting your concern in writing then contact us using one of the methods below and ask for a meeting, which doesn't have to be at the Council's offices. If you wish you can bring other people to the meeting if that will reassure you.

It is important that whichever method you use to make your concern, you make it clear that you are raising the issue as a whistleblower. This gives you additional statutory rights.

How to contact us

There are a number of ways you can contact us.

Complete the electronic form that is available on the Council's web pages at <http://www.huntsdc.gov.uk/>. Type whistleblowing into the search engine or go to W on the A to Z listing, and then select whistleblowing

Send an email to whistleblower@huntsdc.gov.uk

Leave a message on the 24 hour telephone hotline, 01480 387080.

Write a letter, clearly marking the envelope Strictly Private & Confidential to:

Internal Audit & Risk Manager
Huntingdonshire District Council
Pathfinder House
St Mary's Street
Huntingdon
PE29 3TN

No matter which method you use to contact us, all the information you provide will be treated in confidence.

Who will investigate your concern

All concerns are passed to the Council's Internal Audit & Risk Manager as soon as they are received. All electronic forms and emails together with the telephone hotline are accessible only by him. Post that is marked 'strictly private and confidential' will be passed unopened to him.

What we will do

Once you have told us of your concern the Internal Audit & Risk Manager will look into it to assess initially what action should be taken.

The initial assessment may involve an internal inquiry or a more formal investigation. Please be assured that the number of people who are made aware of the concern will be kept to a minimum.

If he believes that your concern is valid, but should not be classed as a whistleblowing concern, e.g. a potential breach of planning consent, then he may pass your concern to a member of staff in the relevant department to investigate. Your concern will be passed on anonymously, your details will remain confidential.

Depending on the outcome of the initial assessment we may decide that your concern is valid but that we have insufficient information to continue with the investigation. If this happens we will try and obtain further information to allow us to continue with the investigation. If this is not possible and no other option is available to us, we may request you to gather additional information on our behalf. You are under no obligation to do this however.

Once we have validated your concern and have sufficient information to continue, your concern will be investigated.

All meetings, decisions and actions taken in dealing with the concern will be recorded in writing.

Letting you know what we're doing

If you have provided contact information you will be told who is handling the matter, how you can contact them and whether your further assistance may be needed. If you request it, we will write to you summarising your concern and setting out how we propose to handle it.

When the investigation has been completed we will contact you again with as much detail about the investigation as we are able to provide. Please note that we may not be able to tell you the precise action we have taken, as this may infringe a duty of confidence owed by us to someone else.

What if we take no action

If after undertaking the initial assessment and speaking with you, we feel that we do not have sufficient information to undertake an investigation into your concern then we will tell you. If you are unhappy about this, you should contact the Chief Executive. He will decide if any further action needs to be taken.

Maintaining confidentiality

We will do our utmost to protect your identity. If it has to be disclosed to allow us to undertake disciplinary or other more serious action against any wrongdoer, then we will discuss this with you. In some circumstances, especially if the Police are involved, we may be legally obliged to disclose your identity without your consent. Again, we will discuss this with you.

If you feel that you are being harassed or victimised because you have raised a concern then you must let us know. We will take action to protect you as long as we believe that your concern was raised in good faith.

Who to report to externally

If you sincerely believe that, by raising your concern with us, you will be subject to victimisation or reprisals of whatever sort, or that evidence to support your concern will be destroyed, then you should raise the matter with an external organisation, known as a "prescribed person".

If you wish to take this course of action, but are unsure of what to do then please contact either the Internal Audit & Risk Manager or the Director of Central Services. They will be able to advise you on what you need to do, without asking for details of your concern. Alternatively you could contact the Audit Commission on their confidential public interest disclosure line 0845 052 2646.

When raising a concern externally remember to make it clear that you are raising the issue as a whistleblower. This gives you additional statutory rights.

Further information and advice

If you want further information or advice about whistleblowing then please contact either:

David Harwood, Internal Audit & Risk Manager ☎ 01480 388115
or
Ian Leatherbarrow, Director of Central Services ☎ 01480 388002