

Huntingdonshire District Council Guidance Note for Whistleblowers

This guidance has been prepared to accompany the Whistleblowing Policy. It explains how the Council will deal with whistleblowing concerns that it receives. The policy can be found on the Council's website and intranet or upon request from the Corporate Director (Services).

We realise that for some individuals it will take a great deal of courage to raise a concern. If you honestly and reasonably believe what you are saying is true, you will have nothing to fear by telling us your concern. 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.

Your concern will be treated in confidence. We will not tolerate the victimisation of anyone who reports an issue to us. Without exception, we will take disciplinary action against anyone who victimises any individual.

Concerns received may 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.

What you need to tell us

If you have a concern then please raise it with us openly rather than anonymously. Openness makes it easier for us to assess the issue, work out how to investigate the matter and if required, obtain more information. It is best if your concern is raised in writing and that you provide your name and some contact information. An email address or telephone number would be sufficient.

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 that should be also be provided. 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. This 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 (e.g. legal representative, colleague, Staff Council or Union representative).

How to contact us

There are a number of ways in which you can raise a concern.

You can:

- speak to your line manager, a member of the Internal Audit team, a Head of Service or the Corporate Director (Services).
- complete the electronic form that is available on the Council's web pages at <http://www.huntingdonshire.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@huntingdonshire.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

Who will investigate your concern?

All concerns received are passed to the Internal Audit & Risk Manager. They are the only person who can see what has been written on the electronic forms or in emails. They are also the only person who can access messages left on the telephone hotline. Post that is marked 'strictly private and confidential' will be passed unopened to them.

The Internal Audit & Risk Manager will use their discretion when deciding if an anonymous concern is to be investigated, taking the following factors into account:

- The seriousness of the issue raised
- The amount of information provided to support of the concern
- Whether the individual may be required to provide further information
- The ability to trace the individual if the concern is considered malicious.

What we will do

Once we have received your concern the Internal Audit & Risk Manager will initially assess the information you have provided and consider what action should be taken.

If the concern is valid but should not be classed as a protected disclosure (e.g. bullying) within the terms of the whistleblowing policy, they will contact you and ask whether you want the information to be passed to the appropriate manager for further action. You will also be asked if you wish your name to be disclosed or not.

Depending on the outcome of the initial assessment it may be 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 we will contact you within 10 working days, summarising your concern and telling you:

- whether an investigation will take place and if not, why not;
- who will be handling the matter and how you can contact them;
- how long we estimate the investigation will take;
- whether your further assistance may be needed; and
- providing you with information on the support that is available to you; and

When the investigation has been completed we will contact you again and provide you with as much detail about the investigation as we are able to. It may be that we aren't 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 you are unhappy with our response

If:

- you believe that we have not properly investigated your concern; or
- you are unhappy with the outcome of any investigation

you should contact the Council's Managing Director or Corporate Director (Services). They will decide if any further action is to be taken.

Who to report to externally

If you

- remain unhappy with the decision reached by the Council's Managing Director or Corporate Director (Services); or
- sincerely believe that by raising your concern with us you will be subject to detriment (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".

The Government has issued a list of prescribed persons who you can make a disclosure to. The list can be found via the following link

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/blowing-the-whistle-list-of-prescribed-people-and-bodies--2>

If you wish to report externally, but are unsure of what to do then please contact either the Internal Audit & Risk Manager or the Corporate Director (Services). They will be able to advise you on what you need to do, without asking for details of your concern.

Alternatively you can contact the Council's external auditors, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, on 0207 213 5497.

When raising a concern externally remember to make it clear that you are raising the issue as a whistleblower.

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 have suffered detriment or been in any way disadvantaged 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 the public interest and that you have not intentionally provided us with false information.

Further information and advice

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

David Harwood, Internal Audit & Risk Manager
or
Julie Slatter, Corporate Director (Services)

☎ 01480 388115

☎ 01480 388103

End.