

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Whistleblowing Policy, Guidance and Concerns Received
Meeting/Date: Corporate Governance Committee – 8th June 2016
Executive Portfolio: Resources: Councillor J A Gray
Report by: Internal Audit & Risk Manager
Ward(s) affected: All Wards

Executive Summary

The whistleblowing policy and guidance is reviewed annually. It was last reviewed in June 2015.

The purpose of whistleblowing law is to protect individuals who make disclosures of wrongdoings in the public interest without fear of reprisals from their employer.

The review of the policy and guidance has been completed by the Internal Audit & Risk Manager against the Whistleblowing Commissions code of practice. The code of practice was used as the basis for the 2015 review and a number of changes were made last year to reflect the code. Consequently it is felt that no changes are required to either the policy or guidance this year apart from updating the contact details of the external auditors.

The policy changes introduced in June 2015 excluded a member of the public from being considered a whistleblower. Only Council employees and contractors and suppliers etc. providing services under a contract to the Council are now classified as whistleblowers. No allegations have been received during 2015/16 that fulfil this criteria.

Members of the public have continued to use the whistleblowing channels available to raise matters of concern and three separate allegations have been received during 2015/16. Due to the nature of these allegations, details cannot be included in the report. The Committee can be assured that each allegation has been investigated.

There are no financial or legal implications arising from this report.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the Committee:

1. approve the changes required to the whistleblowing policy and guidance arising from the appointment of a new external auditor;
2. agree that minor changes to the policy and guidance that do not affect the overall approach taken to whistleblowing can be approved by the Managing Director; and
3. note the whistleblowing concerns received.

1. WHAT IS THIS REPORT ABOUT/PURPOSE?

- 1.1 This report deals with the review of the whistleblowing policy and guidance and contains details of the total number of whistleblowing allegations received during the year ending March 2016.

2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY/BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The whistleblowing policy and guidance was introduced in 2000 in response to the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA). Both documents are reviewed annually to ensure they continue to be fit for purpose.

3. ANALYSIS

Policy and Guidance review

- 3.1 Committee last reviewed the policy and guidance in June 2015. That review introduced a number of changes to mirror best practice requirements as contained in the Whistleblowing Commissions code of practice. The code provides guidance on the raising, handling, training and reviewing of workplace whistleblowing procedures and practices.
- 3.2 The current whistleblowing policy and guidance have been compared to the code of practice. As the code has not been updated in the past year, it is felt that no changes to either the policy or guidance are required.
- 3.3 Ernest & Young LLP were appointed the Council's external auditors from April 2015. The previous external auditors contact details remain in the policy and guidance and is still displayed on publicity material. This will be updated. Future updates to this type of information within the policy, guidance and publicity will be made without reference to the Committee. .

Whistleblowing concerns received

- 3.4 There are a number of channels available for a whistleblower to raise their concerns. These include an internet form, a specific email address and a dedicated 24 hour telephone.
- 3.5 No whistleblowing allegations (as per the definition in the policy) have been received in 2015/16 (2 allegations were received in 2014/15).
- 3.6 Three allegations were received from members of the public.

The allegations fall into the following service areas:

- Planning (1)
- Operations (1)
- Building Control (1)

The Building Control allegation was investigated by Cambridge City Council as they are the lead authority under the shared service arrangement. The other two concerns were investigated internally.

4. KEY IMPACTS

- 4.1 The Council is not required by statute to have a whistleblowing policy in place although it is considered to be best practice.

- 4.2 It is important that employees and contractors have the ability to report, in confidence, issues of concern to the Council. The whistleblowing policy introduces a framework in which this can be done and importantly, sets out the protection that will be afforded to a whistleblower. Dealing effectively with a whistleblowing allegation is important to protect the Council from potentially significant reputation, commercial and financial risks.
- 4.3 Not having a reporting mechanism in place, may lead people to report matters outside of the Council with consequential impacts upon the reputation of the Council.

5. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN

- 5.1 The policy and guidance note will be publicised to employees via the Council's usual communication channels (key issues, team briefings and intranet). A new series of whistleblowing posters will also be designed and displayed across the main offices and the five leisure centres.

6. LINK TO THE CORPORATE PLAN

- 6.1 The whistleblowing policy ensures that employees and contractors are able to raise concerns in the knowledge that they will be taken seriously, investigated appropriately and confidences maintained. Adoption of the policy will ensure that the Council maintains good standards of governance. Good governance underpins the delivery of all of the Corporate Plan objectives.

7. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

- 7.1 Minor changes only are required to the whistleblowing policy and guidance to reflect the change of external auditor. The Committee is required to approve these changes. It is proposed that the Managing Director be given delegated authority to amend the policy or guidance to reflect any other minor changes required with the Committee being informed of all of these changes within the annual report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Whistleblowing Policy](#)

[Whistleblowing Guidance](#)

[Whistleblowing Commissions Code of Practice](#)

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