

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Title/Subject Matter: Whistleblowing Policy, Guidance and Concerns Received
Meeting/Date: Corporate Governance Committee – 24 May 2017
Executive Portfolio: Strategic Resources: Councillor J A Gray
Report by: Internal Audit & Risk Manager
Wards affected: All Wards

Executive Summary

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.

It is recommended that no changes are made to either the whistleblowing policy or guidance.

Only Council employees, contractors or suppliers providing services under a contract to the Council are classified by law as whistleblowers. One allegations has been received during 2016/17 that fulfilled this criteria. The Committee can be assured that the allegation has been investigated by the Internal Audit & Risk Manager, with a positive outcome for the whistleblower.

Members of the public have continued to use the whistleblowing channels available to raise matters of concern and nine separate allegations have been received during 2016/17.

Three new posters were distributed across the Council's offices in February 2017 for display in staff areas, outlining the ways in which a whistleblowing concern could be raised.

The Managing Director considers that the Council's whistleblowing arrangements are effective.

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

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the Committee in noting that the whistleblowing arrangements are considered effective:

1. Accept the results of the annual review of the whistleblowing policy.

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 2017.

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 After undertaking the whistleblowing policy and guidance review in June 2016, Committee recommended 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. No such changes have been made, however the guidance will be updated once the new Corporate Director (Services) has been appointed as they are one of the points of contact for employees. In addition, there have been no significant legislative or legal decisions in the past year that require the policy or guidance to be amended.
- 3.2 To remind staff of the whistleblowing reporting options available to them, a new series of publicity posters was devised and have been displayed across the main offices and the five leisure centres.

Whistleblowing concerns received

- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 One whistleblowing allegation (as per the definition in the policy) has been received in 2016/17 (no allegations were received in 2015/16). Due to the confidential nature of whistleblowing no specific details can be reported.

The allegation was investigated by the Internal Audit & Risk Manager. During the investigation it became clear that the issue reported was being dealt with by the relevant manager and is currently being resolved. The person raising the concern is satisfied with this outcome. The Internal Audit & Risk Manager intends to continue to monitor the situation until full resolution has been achieved.

- 3.5 Nine allegations were received from members of the public. Seven of these were passed onto the appropriate service department for action. The two remaining allegations were not related to Council services and passed to the relevant external organisation.

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 sets out the 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. The Managing Director is of the opinion that the current policy, guidance and publicity material gives employees and others the opportunity to raise matters through the whistleblowing channels available.

5. WHAT ACTIONS WILL BE TAKEN

5.1 The policy and guidance note has already been recently publicised to employees via the Council's usual communication channels (key issues, team briefings and intranet).

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 a policy helps to support good standards of governance. Good governance underpins the delivery of all of the Corporate Plan objectives.

7. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDED DECISIONS

7.1 After reviewing the policy and guidance no changes to either document are required. The policy requires an annual report be presented to the Committee on the effectiveness of the arrangements that have been introduced.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Whistleblowing Policy

Whistleblowing Guidance

Whistleblowing allegations received (exempt information)

CONTACT OFFICER

David Harwood. Internal Audit & Risk Manager

Tel No. 01480 388115

david.harwood@huntingdonshire.gov.uk