



Chelmsford City Council Governance Committee

18 October 2023

Annual Whistleblowing Report

Report by:

Director of Connected Chelmsford

Officer Contact:

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Purpose

To provide an annual update to members of the Governance Committee on the operation of the Council's Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure.

Recommendations

1. To note the contents of the report as regards complaints received.

1. Background

- 1.1. The Council's Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure was first introduced in October 1997. Since that time the policy has been updated and reviewed periodically to ensure it is compliant with any changes in legislation or guidance, most notably a light touch review was undertaken earlier this year.
- 1.2. The policy establishes a system whereby employees of the Council, including agency workers, consultants, users of its services, members of the public and

Councillors, are able to report suspected wrongdoing. By doing so the Council publicly declares that it does not tolerate malpractice or fraudulent activities in the operation of its services.

- 1.3. The Council's Whistleblowing Policy highlights the legal protection for workers who "blow the whistle" (i.e. the 'Whistleblower') and ensure that they do not suffer any recriminations, victimisation or harassment as a result of raising a concern with the Council. An employee who makes a protected disclosure benefits from legal protection if they have a reasonable belief that the issue being raised is in the public interest.
- 1.4. Employees are protected under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 as amended, which means that the Council cannot discriminate against them because they made such a complaint. That protection is not subject to any qualifying period of employment and is referred to as a 'day one' right in employment law. The principles of protection are also applied to non-employees under the Council's Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure.
- 1.5. The Council's appointed Whistleblowing Officer is the Director of Connected Chelmsford. However, the day-to-day management and handling of issues raised is dealt with by the Legal & Democratic Services Manager or, in their absence, the Human Resources Services Manager. Both have delegated authority to receive and investigate complaints under the procedure whilst safeguarding the confidentiality of the complainant as far as is possible. Normally this means the identity of the whistleblower will only be known by the officer managing the complaint and any investigator. All complaints raised are fully considered and dealt with swiftly.
- 1.6. In many cases the issue raised is not strictly a whistleblowing matter but a complaint about a service received from the Council. In those cases the matter is passed to the relevant department to resolve direct with the complainant. This is noted on the papers and is then dealt with outside the Whistleblowing procedure.
- 1.7. As is best practice an annual report is made to the Governance Committee regarding the issues addressed. The last such report was made in 2022 and this report provides the update since that time. The Council's existing Retention and Destruction Policy in relation to Whistleblowing complaints is to retain records for 6 years after matters are completed and accordingly the report has been updated to include data from the last 6 years.

2. Position Update and Analysis

2.1. The table below provides a history of the number of whistleblowing reported cases received over the previous years:

Year	Number of complaints received
2016 - 2017	13
2017 - 2018 (to Oct 2017 only)	8
2018-2019 (to Oct 2018 only)	13
2019 (October 2018 – December 2019)	5
2020 (January - October 2020)	5
2021 (November 2020 to November 2021)	12
2022 (December 2021 to September 2022)	5
2023 (October 2022 to September 2023)	7

2.2. A summary of the complaints received over the past year since October 2022 are set out below. Members are reminded that further information cannot be provided due to the confidentiality protection to which whistle blowers are entitled. 2 alleged issues that were outside of Chelmsford City Council's geographical area. 5 reports alleged wrongdoing by staff or in relation to services. These have been investigated and/or action taken as appropriate. 3 of the reports also involved a service complaint element which was also considered and dealt with appropriately.

How they were processed

No public interest dimension so could not be dealt with as a WB complaint, or was instead assessed and investigated as a service complaint	0
Assessed and investigated as a whistleblowing complaint.	5
Not capable of resolution by the City Council (i.e. outside our jurisdiction)	2

2.3. It is apparent that both staff and members of the public have confidence in the Council and are willing to raise concerns. The electronic facilities for logging complaints through the dedicated whistleblowing mailbox and through website forms remain the preferred method of communication. The publicity arrangements for whistleblowing also appear to be embedded and working well.

2.4. Every effort is made to maintain confidentiality where requested. When this is not possible complainants are advised and provided with the reasons. Complainants' details are not disclosed until they are made aware of how they will be used. This allows officers to follow up on concerns raised and to provide progress updates and feedback when a case is concluded. This approach instils trust and confidence in the arrangements in place and fosters a relationship of openness and accountability.

2.5. The policy is part of staff induction training and is easily accessible on the Council's website. It should be noted that the Audit and Risk Committee are currently reviewing the Fraud and Corruption Policy and Anti Bribery Policy. The Whistleblowing Policy will be reviewed further once this has been completed to ensure they are aligned and compliment the overall arrangements.

3. Conclusion

3.1. Members of the Governance Committee are asked to note the details as to the complaints received for the latest annual review and that further changes as a result of the work being undertaken by Audit and Risk Committee will be reported in 2024.

List of appendices: None

Background papers: None

Corporate Implications

Legal/Constitutional: The legislative requirements are addressed in the report

Financial: None, although the process enables reporting of potential fraudulent activities and malpractices that may affect the financial position of the Council

Potential impact on climate change and the environment: None

Contribution toward achieving a net zero carbon position by 2030: None

Personnel: The process underpins the promotion of a culture of openness and transparency and creates an environment where whistleblowing is encouraged and supported.

Risk Management: The process assists to minimise the risk of malpractice and fraud within the Council

Equality and Diversity: The policy and procedure has not changed so no impact assessment is required

Health and Safety: Establishment of whistleblowing procedures ensures that both Council employees and users of its services are able to confidentially report matters of concern (including those with H&S implications) and for these to be proactively addressed.

Digital: None

Other: None

Consultees:

None

Relevant Policies and Strategies:

The report takes into account the following policies and strategies of the Council:

- Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure
 - Fraud and Corruption Strategy
 - Anti-bribery Policy
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