

Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee

10am, Tuesday 9 June 2020

Whistleblowing annual report

Item number
Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 To note the report and approve the Convener referral recommendation in para 4.11 below.

Andrew Kerr

Chief Executive

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Report

Whistleblowing annual report

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report covers the fifth full year of operation of the Council's whistleblowing service for the period 1 January – 31 December 2019.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Council's whistleblowing service, including telephone, email and online reporting; disclosure management; investigations and training continues to be provided by an independent company, currently Safecall Limited.
- 3.2 The Council's Whistleblowing policy (section 4.3.2) requires that annual summary reports on whistleblowing activity are presented to the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee.

4. Main report

Disclosures

- 4.1 During the reporting period Safecall received 20 disclosures, a reduction on the 26 reported in the previous year. The total number of disclosures received in 2019 remains below the average for Safecall's client base of approximately 1 per 500 employees per annum.
- 4.2 As will be noted from the statistics, one of the disclosures received was categorised major/significant by Safecall, with another still to be determined.

Category	Number of disclosures
Major/significant disclosures	1
Minor/operational disclosures	17
Category still to be determined	1

Non-qualifying disclosures	1
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Investigations

- 4.3 Twenty investigations (relating to twenty-six disclosures) were completed during the reporting period with outcomes and management action reported quarterly to the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee.
- 4.4 Fourteen investigations, relating to fifteen disclosures, are ongoing and will be reported to the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee on completion.
- 4.5 One report did not quality as a disclosure under the Whistleblowing Policy but the Whistleblowing Team ensured that appropriate checks were carried out to establish the issue raised was not one of concern.
- 4.6 Recommendations that have resulted from investigations have led to amendments to policy, improvements to procedures and processes, the development of best practice and improved service delivery. Examples include: improved fire risk assessment procedures for care homes and review and improvements to 'driving for the Council' policy, monitoring and guidance.
- 4.7 Where the service provider has an open line of communication with the whistleblower, feedback on the outcome of an investigation has been provided. Where this has not been possible, information has been recorded for dissemination to the whistleblower should they make further contact.

Whistleblowing Services Contract

- 4.8 The contract for the independent service provider ended on 11 May 2020. A full re-procurement process was undertaken, with Safecall Limited being awarded the contract by the Chief Executive under delegated authority provisions.

Policy Review

- 4.9 Annual review of the Whistleblowing Policy was scheduled for the Policy and Sustainability Committee meeting on 2 June 2020. This will be rescheduled when Trade Union consultation has been possible.
- 4.10 A workshop to discuss contractual and operational arrangements was held on 23 October 2019, with Governance, Risk and Best Value committee members present, and number of improvements were proposed, including:

- 4.10.1 the introduction of final closure reports to Committee on all major investigations, outlining the actions taken to address the recommendations in reports;
 - 4.10.2 the introduction of additional process steps to clarify responsibilities and decision making;
 - 4.10.3 additional guidance for whistleblowers up front on the level of feedback that can be expected on the outcome of investigations; and
 - 4.10.4 amendments to the Whistleblowing policy to reflect the above.
- 4.11 Further to the workshop it is also recommended that the details of all major investigations shared with GRBV will also be referred to the Committee Convener responsible for the relevant service for their information and scrutiny.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Operational arrangements will be reviewed as part of the implementation of the new service provider contract.
- 5.2 The policy will be amended to reflect the improvements outlined at 4.10 and presented to the Policy and Sustainability Committee for approval in due course..

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The cost of the whistleblowing service for the year 1 January to 31 December 2019 was £18,900 (exclusive of VAT).
- 6.2 Investigation costs for the same period totalled £4,614.60 (exclusive of VAT).

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 The whistleblowing policy was developed and agreed in order to complement management reporting arrangements and to ensure all matters at the Council are fully transparent and officers are accountable.
- 7.2 The aim of the policy and the appointment of an independent service provider is to empower employees to report suspected wrongdoing as early as possible in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated appropriately; that they will be protected from victimisation and other forms of detriment; and that their confidentiality will be maintained.
- 7.3 The whistleblowing policy, and subsequent reviews, have been consulted on with the trades unions to secure a local agreement.

8. Background reading/external references

- 8.1 [Finance and Resources Committee 23 May 2019: item 7.20 Whistleblowing Policy](#)

9. Appendices

- 9.1 Safecall Annual Management Information Report 2019