

Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee

10am, Tuesday 8 March 2022

Whistleblowing update

Item number
Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

1. Recommendations

1.1 To note whistleblowing activity for the quarter 1 October – 31 December 2021.

Andrew Kerr

Chief Executive

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Whistleblowing update

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report provides a high-level overview of the operation of the Council's whistleblowing service for the quarter 1 October – 31 December 2021.
- 2.2 This reporting period covers months nineteen to twenty-one of coronavirus pandemic measures, with restrictions easing significantly but continuing government advice to work from home where possible. As a result, significant numbers of Council staff are still working from home.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Council's whistleblowing service (including a confidential reporting line) is contracted to an independent external organisation, Safecall Limited.
- 3.2 The Council's Whistleblowing policy (section 4.3.2) notes that quarterly summary reports on whistleblowing activity will be presented to the Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee.

4. Main report

4.1 Disclosures

During the reporting period Safecall received 21 new disclosures:

Category	Number of disclosures
Major/significant disclosures	1
Minor/operational disclosures	13
Category still to be determined	3
Non-qualifying disclosures	4

- 4.2 A downward trend in the number of disclosures observed over the last three quarters has ended, with numbers returning to the high level experienced in the fourth quarter of 2020, with 21 new disclosures in this reporting period. This is encouraging and to be welcomed as it aligns with the publication of the Tanner Inquiry and Review reports to Council.

Susanne Tanner QC Review

- 4.3 During the quarter the Monitoring Officer's team assisted the Pinsent Masons review team in the provision of a final tranche of documentation, statistics and affirmation of the data collated by the review team prior to conclusion and publication of their report.
- 4.4 As a result of both the Tanner Inquiry and Review reported to Council in October and December 2021 there will be a significant amount of work to be undertaken to implement the recommendations. Updates will be provided in this regard once the full scope and proposals have been established.
- 4.5 Committee should however note that at present the existing policies, systems and processes remain in place and there is no additional staff resource to deal with this. Pending the design and implementation of new systems and processes and recruitment of staff to deal with triage and investigations, the Governance team is working with HR and Safecall to process and progress whistleblowing matters in the most effective way possible. However, Committee should note that this team is presently relatively small and is also the team required to deliver the May 2022 elections. Put simply, it will take some time for the Tanner recommendations to be fully implemented and there will be a period during which we transition from the old to the new model of working. However, this may not match the expectations of those using or involved with the service, who will not see wholesale change immediately.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 It is anticipated that significant focus will be required to deliver the Council's action plan to follow the outcome of the whistleblowing culture review and that this will be the priority in activity undertaken in the short and longer term.
- 5.2 A revised whistleblowing policy, that will reflect the recommendations of the Tanner Report, will be presented to the consultative group with the Trade Unions in due course and thereafter to the Policy and Sustainability Committee for approval. If approved, it will be sent to members of GRBV for information.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 Costs incurred for the whistleblowing service during the three-month period 1 October – 31 December 2021 totalled £5,225.00 (excluding VAT).

7. Stakeholder/Community Impact

- 7.1 The whistleblowing policy was developed and agreed 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 None.