

Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee

10am, Tuesday 24 January 2023

Whistleblowing update

Item number
Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

1. Recommendations

1.1 To note whistleblowing activity for the quarter 1 July – 30 September 2022.

Andrew Kerr

Chief Executive

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Report

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 July – 30 September 2022.

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) provides 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 14 new disclosures:

Category	Number of disclosures
Major/significant disclosures	1
Minor/operational disclosures	13
Category still to be determined	0
Non-qualifying disclosures	0

- 4.2 The number of disclosures received is similar to the previous quarter when there were 16. This continues to reflect a significant overall increase in quarterly activity when compared to previous years.

Susanne Tanner QC Led Inquiry and Review

- 4.3 The Monitoring Officer and Governance Manager have continued to contribute to the programme of work to progress and implement the recommendations of the Inquiry and Review. This report is not intended to be an update on this workstream, which will continue to be reported as agreed by Council.
- 4.4 The revised whistleblowing policy and toolkit, which incorporate all recommendations of the review, have been updated to reflect comments from Safecall and Pinsent Masons and an advanced draft is currently with trade union colleagues for comment.
- 4.5 Interim arrangements for disclosure triage are ongoing, with fortnightly meetings between Governance, Human Resources and Legal Services taking place to ensure patterns and issues of concern are identified and dealt with appropriately.
- 4.6 The second stage of recruitment for additional resource for the Governance Team has commenced and it is anticipated the three remaining posts will be operational in early 2023.
- 4.7 The new Investigations Team is now operational and progressing all new internal investigations. A small number of older investigations that had been subject to significant delay or other issues of concern have also been reallocated to the investigations team to ensure that they are concluded without delay.
- 4.8 The new Speak Up Champions have been appointed and a programme of induction and training will commence later this month.
- 4.9 Existing policies, systems and processes remain in place, pending implementation of the new policy and related processes. Wherever possible, Safecall, the Monitoring Officer, the Governance Team and HR colleagues continue to apply the principles of the Tanner recommendations to current operating arrangements.

Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee Whistleblowing Workshop

- 4.10 The workshop agenda, scheduled for 15 November 2022, included sessions on the process, key challenges, GRBV reporting, the new approach following the Tanner Review and options for a Whistleblowing Sub-Committee. In attendance were GRBV Committee members, the Monitoring Officer, Governance Manager, Investigations Team Manager and Team Leader and representatives from Safecall, the Council's independent whistleblowing services provider.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Significant focus continues to be required to deliver the Council's action plan in response to the outcome of the whistleblowing culture review and this continues to be the priority in activity undertaken in the short and longer term. It is imperative that this is a change in overall culture, of which whistleblowing is only a small but important part.

- 5.2 The revised whistleblowing policy and toolkit, which reflect the recommendations of the Tanner Report, have been presented to the consultative group with the Trade Unions with the aim of achieving a collective agreement. Thereafter it will be presented to the Policy and Sustainability Committee for approval and will then 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 July – 30 September 2022 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.