

Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee

10am, Tuesday 14 March 2023

Whistleblowing update

Item number
Executive/routine
Wards
Council Commitments

1. Recommendations

1.1 To note whistleblowing activity for the quarter 1 October – 31 December 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 October – 31 December 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 22 new disclosures:

Category	Number of disclosures
Major/significant disclosures	1
Minor/operational disclosures	21
Category still to be determined	0
Non-qualifying disclosures	0

- 4.2 The number of disclosures received is a significant increase on the previous quarter, when there were 14, and continues to reflect a significant overall increase in quarterly activity when compared to previous years.

Susanne Tanner KC 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, had previously been updated to reflect comments from Safecall and Pinsent Masons. During this quarter the drafts were subject to Trade Union consultation and amended to reflect trade union feedback.
- 4.5 Interim arrangements for disclosure triage continue, 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 concluded, with onboarding and induction of the three new Governance Officers taking place during January 2023.
- 4.7 The Investigations Team are now fully operational and progressing all new internal investigations, along with a small number of older investigations that had been subject to delay or other issues (eg the original investigating officer leaving the Council).
- 4.8 The Investigations Team Leader and Governance Manager have established a programme of regular meetings to continue to develop working arrangements between the two teams and discuss matters of mutual interest and concern.
- 4.9 An induction day for the new Speak Up Champions was held in December and will be followed by a programme of training over the coming months.
- 4.10 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, the Investigations Team and HR colleagues continue to apply the principles of the Tanner recommendations to current operating arrangements.
- 4.11 The Governance Team have developed a project plan to manage delivery of the numerous workstreams from the I&R Review Action Plan recommendations and the GRBV Whistleblowing Workshop that will be delivered during the first quarter of 2023. The aim is to have all policy and toolkit requirements in place for launch of the new policy and toolkit and reporting proposals ready for consideration by the new Whistleblowing Sub-Committee of GRBV.

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 worked upon as a priority. It is imperative that this is a change in overall culture, of which whistleblowing is only a small but important part. At present, high levels of matters continuing to be raised via whistleblowing mean that the focus of the team is currently on ensuring that these are progresses as quickly and efficiently as possible.

- 5.2 GRBV members agreed, at their workshop in November, that they wished to meet with the Trade Unions to discuss the new policy and toolkit. This engagement will take place prior to the revised whistleblowing policy and toolkit being presented to the Policy and Sustainability Committee for approval.
- 5.3 Given Council agreed the creation of a Whistleblowing Sub-Committee of GRBV at its meeting on 9 February, the Convener and Service Director: Legal & Assurance will consider frequency and dates of meetings to be added to the Council diary.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 Costs incurred for the whistleblowing service during the three-month period 1 October – 31 December 2022 totalled £7,530.70 (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.