

# Governance, Risk and Best Value Committee

10am, Tuesday 19 September 2023

## Whistleblowing Update

Item number  
Executive/routine  
Wards  
Council Commitments

### 1. Recommendations

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1.1 To note whistleblowing activity for the six-month period 1 January – 30 June 2023.

**Andrew Kerr**

Chief Executive

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# Report

## Whistleblowing update

### 2. Executive Summary

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- 2.1 This report provides a high-level overview of the operation of the Council's whistleblowing service for the six-month period 1 January – 30 June 2023.

### 3. Background

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- 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.
- 3.3 The Council's newly constituted Governance, Risk and Best Value Whistleblowing Sub-Committee will consider detailed quarterly monitoring reports in private, with high-level update reports presented to the main committee on a six-monthly basis.

### 4. Main report

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#### 4.1 Disclosures

During the reporting period Safecall received 34 new disclosures:

Category	Number of disclosures
Major/significant disclosures	2
Minor/operational disclosures	27
Category still to be determined	2
Non-qualifying disclosures	3

- 4.2 The number of disclosures received is similar to the previous six-month period, when there were 36, however nine of the minor disclosures were about the same issue resulting in a reduction in matters for investigation in the period.

### **Susanne Tanner KC Led Inquiry and Review**

- 4.3 The programme of work to progress and implement the recommendations of the Inquiry and Review is continuing. 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, Pinsent Masons and the Trade Unions. The next step in the process will be a meeting between GRBV members and the Trade Unions, prior to presentation of the policy for approval at the Policy & Sustainability Committee in the Autumn.
- 4.5 Interim arrangements for disclosure triage continue, with fortnightly meetings between Governance, Human Resources, Employment Law and Investigations taking place to ensure patterns and issues of concern are identified and dealt with appropriately.
- 4.6 A digital learning module for colleagues and managers has been developed by Learning & Development and will be available on myLearningHub to coincide with launch of the new whistleblowing policy in the Autumn.
- 4.7 A bespoke portal landing page for the Council is currently in development. This page is being customised to provide Council specific information such as links to important documents (eg. the whistleblowing policy, what to expect guidance, information on the supports available) and answers to frequently asked questions. Colleagues accessing the portal will be taken to our bespoke landing page rather than a generic page used by the majority of Safecall's clients.
- 4.8 Although the Early Resolution Protocol doesn't officially come into effect until the new policy is approved, the Monitoring Officer and Governance Team have utilised the ERP principles in relation to new cases where this has been considered appropriate.
- 4.9 Speak Up Supporters (previously known as Speak Up Champions) are continuing with a programme of training and development. The Speak Up Supporters have also created a Terms of Reference for the group and are currently working on a Speak Up Supporters information leaflet which will go on the Orb.
- 4.10 New Orb and website pages have been developed to provide more information, guidance and support to whistleblowers and others with an interest in the process. These will be made live to coincide with the launch of the new policy in the Autumn.
- 4.11 Refreshed reporting template proposals, based on the requirements of members outlined at the Whistleblowing workshop, have been developed for the Whistleblowing Sub-Committee. The aim is to demonstrate their functionality to

members at the December meeting of the sub-committee for implementation at the start of 2024.

### **Safecall Contract**

- 4.12 The Council took up the first of two optional twelve-month extensions to the current provider contract commencing on 12 May 2023. This included an increase in contract cost to reflect the additional work the Council will be expecting of Safecall to meet the requirements of the new whistleblowing policy and the recommendations of the Inquiry and Review.
- 4.13 The Council has the option to extend the current contract for a further twelve-month period from 12 May 2024 until 11 May 2025. Should this option not be taken up then procurement for an external provider will need to commence at the end of 2023 for a new contract to start on 12 May 2024.
- 4.14 The Monitoring Officer will bring forward proposals for pre-consultation regarding re-procurement of the contract to the meeting of the Whistleblowing Sub-Committee on 4 December 2023.

## **5. Next Steps**

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- 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.
- 5.2 Process critical templates, guidance documents, protocols and tools are well advanced in their development and continued focus will be applied to ensure these are ready for policy launch.
- 5.3 GRBV members agreed that they wished to meet with the Trade Unions to discuss the new policy and toolkit. This engagement will take place prior to the policy and toolkit being presented to the Policy and Sustainability Committee for approval in the Autumn.

## **6. Financial impact**

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- 6.1 Costs incurred for the whistleblowing service during the six-month period 1 January – 30 June 2023 totalled £36,948.45 (excluding VAT).

## **7. Stakeholder/Community Impact**

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- 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**

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

## **9. Appendices**

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- 9.1 None.