



Whistleblowing Policy

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Document Control:

Title	Whistleblowing Policy
Reference	
Status / Date	Version 7.0 / Nov 2020
Author Position	Max Thomas Head of Internal Audit, Veritau
Date Created	December 2011

Whistleblowing Policy Acceptance

Our **Whistleblowing Policy** has been approved and represents the requirements highlighted by Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council.

On behalf of Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council:

Name: JOHN SAMPSON
Position: Managing Director
Date: November 2020

*Footnote:
This Policy, and the accompanying procedures and reporting forms, represents an important part of the Council’s approach to dealing with the risk of fraud and corruption. This Policy seeks to complement the Anti Money Laundering Policy and the Anti Fraud, Bribery & Corruption Policy and contribute to the overall framework of corporate governance established to ensure that the Council is well managed and fulfils its statutory and regulatory duties in a proper and responsible manner.*

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 **Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. The Council supports the legislation afforded by the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 and therefore encourages elected members, employees, contractors, members of the public and others that it deals with, to come forward and voice any serious concerns they may have about any aspect of the Council's work.**
- 1.2 Whilst the Council has established rules, regulations and procedures to promote the highest standards of conduct and commitment to service delivery, irregularities, wrong-doing or serious failures in standards may sometimes occur.
- 1.3 This policy makes it clear that employees can voice a concern without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage. It is intended to encourage and enable members, employees and others to raise serious concerns within the Council rather than overlooking a problem or 'blowing the whistle' outside.
- 1.4 The Council will not tolerate fraud, bribery and corruption in the administration of its responsibilities, whether from inside or outside the authority. The Council will deal firmly with those who seek to defraud the authority, or who are found to be corrupt, in accordance with this policy. The Council has an Anti Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy and a Counter Fraud Strategy which demonstrates its firm, clear and unambiguous commitment to preventing fraud, bribery and corruption. If fraud, bribery or corruption is discovered, the Council will deal swiftly with the perpetrators in accordance with that Policy.

2. Expectations on Employees and elected Members

- 2.1 The Council wants to identify and remove any malpractice in the performance and delivery of its services and expects that:
 - All staff and elected Members will raise any suspected wrongdoing that they become aware of in accordance with this Policy;
 - All managers who are notified of a concern take the appropriate action and that all concerns are investigated and responded to;
 - All managers ensure that anyone raising a concern is not subject to any form of victimisation or disadvantage.

3. Aims and Scope

- 3.1 This Policy is intended as a clear statement that any malpractice by members, employees or third parties (including contractors) reported to the Council will be swiftly and thoroughly investigated. It intends to provide all employees (including schools), agency workers, contractors and Members of the Council with:
 - The confidence to raise concerns and to question;
 - Avenues for employees and others to raise those concerns and receive feedback on any action taken;

- Ensure that those raising a concern receive a response to concerns raised (unless the concern is raised anonymously) and are aware of how to pursue them if they are not satisfied;
- Reassurances that all efforts will be made to protect anyone reporting a concern from reprisals or victimisation.

3.2 The term 'whistleblowing' is meant to cover concerns that fall outside the scope of other types of issues relating to employment (e.g. breaches of employment contracts, grievances, allegations of harassment and/or bullying). Such complaints or grievances should be dealt with according to the **Employee Concerns Policy**. Set out below is a list which is intended to illustrate the sorts of issues which could legitimately be raised under this Whistleblowing Policy:

- Corruption, theft or fraud including obtaining money (e.g. grants, loans, social care payments) or assets without entitlement;
- Theft or misuse of Council assets (stores, equipment, vehicles, IT);
- Breach of or failure to comply with a statutory or legal obligation;
- Health and safety risks, including risks to the public as well as other employees;
- Failure of an individual to comply with their professional institute's standards of conduct;
- Abuse of direct payments/personal budgets;
- Deliberate falsification of data or information;
- Deliberate disclosure of personal information (depending on circumstances, this may be investigated under the Council's information security breach investigation procedures);
- Failure of an individual to comply with Council policy or procedure;
- Damage to the environment or Council property;
- Abuse of power or position, unethical conduct or corrupt practices;
- Abuse of any vulnerable person;
- Deliberate concealing of information relating to any of the above and/or failure to take reasonable steps to report and rectify any situation which could result in the Council incurring avoidable costs or loss of income.

3.3 These examples are not exhaustive and the overriding concern should be that it would be in the public interest or in the interests of others or the Council for the alleged malpractice to be corrected and, if appropriate, sanctions applied.

So, individuals can follow this policy to report concerns which:

- Make them feel uncomfortable in terms of known standards, their experience or the standards they believe the Council subscribes to, or
- Are against the Council's Standing Orders and policies, or
- Fall below established standards of practice, or
- Amount to improper conduct.

4. How to raise a Concern

4.1 The Council expects the co-operation of all employees in securing the highest standards of service to local residents and it is expected that an employee should report any suspected concerns when they become aware of them. Failure to report a concern will be regarded as a serious matter which could result in disciplinary

action being taken or, in the case of a Member, be regarded as a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct.

- 4.2 It is envisaged that, in many cases, the first point of contact for raising a concern should be the relevant line manager/assistant director/head teacher (for employees) or the Leader of the Group (for elected members). Where a concern relates to a head teacher then the matter should be reported to the chair of governors. It will become the line manager's or leader's responsibility to perform a prompt and initial investigation of all matters reported to them. However, it is appreciated that there may be circumstances where an individual does not feel able to report a whistleblowing matter to their line manager or leader, for example when the whistleblower suspects that their line manager or leader may be involved in the alleged malpractice or where the matter has been raised but the line manager has failed to take the appropriate action. In such cases, the matter should be reported to the Council's audit and counter fraud service provider, Veritau.

Veritau provide a whistleblowing hotline service whereby a caller can speak to a member of the Team or leave a message. If the caller chooses to remain anonymous, they can still leave details of their concern. The concern will be investigated as far as possible and practicable based on the information provided.

The whistleblowing hotline number is **0800 9179247**. A message can be left at any time of the day. Concerns can also be reported via email at whistleblowing@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk. Both the hotline and email address are monitored solely by Veritau.

This whistleblowing policy applies to employees and contractors of the Council and not for members of the public. However, if a member of the public does have a concern that they wish to raise then they are encouraged to call the whistleblowing hotline.

- 4.3 Veritau has the following remit:

- To receive and record all complaints made to Veritau under this Policy;
- To ensure as far as able the confidentiality of any whistleblowing complainant who requests that their complaint be treated in confidence, subject to any legal requirements;
- To investigate promptly any whistleblowing complaint and to respond directly to the complainant;
- To report to the appropriate service manager/assistant director where the investigation identifies a serious cause for concern within the responsibilities of that officer and to recommend the use of any relevant statutory powers or duties. Where the complaint relates to the conduct of an assistant director then Veritau will report to the appropriate director. Where the allegation relates to a director, Veritau will report to the Managing Director (and to the Monitoring Officer in case of complaints in relation to member conduct). Where the complaint relates to the Managing Director, Veritau should report to the Monitoring Officer;
- To report on a periodic basis to the Governance Committee on the number and type of concerns being raised under this Policy.

- 4.4 Employees might wish to discuss their concerns in confidence with a colleague first, and may find it easier to raise the matter if there are two or more employees who have the same concern.
- 4.5 The amount of contact between the officers considering the issues and the whistleblower will depend on the nature of the matters raised and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, further information may be requested from the whistleblower.
- 4.6 When a meeting is arranged between the whistleblower and the investigating officer(s) about the concerns raised, then the whistleblower has the right, if they so wish, to be accompanied by a trade union or professional association representative or a friend. Such meetings can also be held at a mutually agreeable location.
- 4.7 If you need further advice on how to raise a concern, please contact the Veritau team.

5. How the Council Will Respond

- 5.1 To protect both individuals and the Council, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, in what form. The action taken and procedure to be followed will depend on the nature of the concern. Concerns or allegations that fall within the scope of specific procedures (e.g. employment contract issues) will normally be referred for consideration under these procedures. Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for detailed investigation.
- 5.2 The matters raised may involve:
- Internal investigation by management and / or Veritau;
 - Referral to the Police;
 - Referral to the external auditor;
 - An independent inquiry;
 - Referral to the Governance Committee.
- 5.3 Within 10 working days of a concern being received (unless, in the circumstances, this is inappropriate or impractical), the officer designated to perform the investigation will write/email the whistleblower to:
- Acknowledge that the concern has been received;
 - Indicate how the Council intends to deal with the matter;
 - Give an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response;
 - State whether any initial enquiries have been made;
 - Tell the employee whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not;
 - Provide information on staff support mechanisms if appropriate.
- 5.4 Whistleblowers may be asked to supply more information or to clarify, if necessary. When any meeting is arranged, the whistleblower has the right, if they so wish, to be accompanied by trade union representative or work colleague who is not involved in the area of work to which the concern relates.

- 5.5 The Council understands that the whistleblower needs to be assured that their concerns have been investigated and addressed. Subject to any legal constraints, information about the outcomes of any investigations will be provided to the whistleblower.
- 5.6 The Council's commitment to the highest possible standards of probity means that it will ensure that the necessary resources are put into investigating any concerns received under this Policy. As a consequence of this, the Council will view very seriously any obvious false or malicious allegations which it receives, and will regard the making of any deliberately malicious or vexatious allegations by any employee or member as a potential disciplinary matter.

6. The Responsible Officer

- 6.1 The Managing Director has overall responsibility for whistleblowing concerns, and, on his behalf, Veritau will maintain a confidential record of concerns raised and the results of any investigations made. Anonymised summaries of the results of investigations raised under this Policy will be reported on a periodic basis to the Governance Committee.

7. Whistleblower Safeguards

- 7.1 The Council will not tolerate any attempt to take reprisals against any person who has reported a serious and genuine concern. The Council will treat any such recriminations, victimisation or harassment as a serious matter which may, in the case of an employee, amount to a disciplinary matter and, in the case of a member, to a matter, depending on the circumstances, that may amount to a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct. If a whistleblower who has raised a valid concern under this Policy feels that they have then been victimised because of raising such concerns, they can raise the matter directly with Veritau who will raise the matter immediately with the appropriate Director.
- 7.2 A whistleblower may be entitled to take civil action against any employee or Member that subjects them to any recrimination, victimisation or harassment because of raising a concern. Moreover, the Council could be held liable if it has not taken all reasonable steps to prevent such conduct occurring. Individuals may also have statutory protection under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.
- 7.3 The Council will respect (so far as it can legally) the confidentiality of any whistleblowing complaint received, where the whistleblower requests that confidentiality. However, it cannot guarantee that the investigation process will not result in colleagues speculating on the identity of the whistleblower. It should be appreciated that it will be easier to investigate allegations if the whistleblower is prepared to provide his/her name. Unsupported and anonymous complaints are less powerful and must be treated with caution. There will be circumstances where information must be disclosed for legal reasons e.g. an obligation under the Freedom of Information Act or if the circumstances of an allegation amount to a serious crime there may be a requirement to pass information to senior officers or to the Police or external auditors.
- 7.4 The Council will take steps to minimise any difficulties which the whistleblower may experience because of raising a concern. For instance, if a whistleblower is required

to provide evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, the Council will provide advice about the procedure.

8. Taking Matters Further

- 8.1 This policy is intended to help employees raise concerns within the Council and hopes that employees will be satisfied with any action taken. If employees are not satisfied that the outcome of the investigation has adequately addressed the concerns raised then they should advise the Responsible Officer, the Managing Director.
- 8.2 If individuals feel it is right to raise a matter outside the Council, the following are possible contact points:
- The External Auditor;
 - Local Council member (if you live in the area of the Council);
 - Chair or any member of the Governance Committee;
 - Relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations, for example, the Information Commissioner's Office;
 - The Police (where criminal activity is suspected);
 - Local Citizens Advice Bureau;
 - Appropriate trade union/professional association;
 - Your solicitor;
 - Public Concern at Work.
- 8.3 Public Concern at Work is a registered charity set up to give free independent advice to employees who contact them with concerns. The Public Concern at Work telephone number for general enquiries and helpline is **020 7404 6609**.
- 8.4 Concerns about children at risk of abuse may be raised with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) via dedicated 24 national helplines on 0808 800 5000 (for non professionals) or 0800 028 0285 (for children's' services professionals) or by completing an online form (www.nspcc.org.uk).
- 8.5 Any member of the public may make a complaint against the Council by contacting;
- The Local Government Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
Coventry CV4 0EH
- More detail on how to make a complaint to the LGO can be found at www.lgo.org.uk/making-a-complaint or call the helpline **0300 061 0614**.
- 8.6 **If employees do consider reporting a matter outside of the Council, they should note that the relevant legislation anticipates that matters should generally be considered internally by organisations. Individuals making disclosures to outside bodies will only receive statutory protection under that legislation in certain circumstances. In particular, employees must honestly and reasonably believe that the information and allegations are true.**

9. Review of Policy

- 9.1 This Policy will be reviewed every 2 years.

9.2 Revisions will be made in the interim, as and when required, to address changes in legislation and/or government policies.

10. Reference Documents

10.1 This Policy should be read in conjunction with the following supporting documents:

- Anti Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy
- Financial Regulations
- Members' Code of Conduct
- Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
- Employee Concerns Policy
- Information Security Policy
- Anti-Money Laundering Policy
- Data Quality Policy