



Confidential Reporting Policy

- Whistleblowing

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Human Resources Management

Authorised by: Chief Executive

Effective date: June 2008 updated January 2014

1. Scope

The policy applies to employees and also contractors working for the Council on Council premises. It also covers suppliers and those providing services under a contract with the Council in their own premises.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to encourage employees and others to feel confident in raising serious concerns by providing clear avenues through which those concerns can be raised and reassuring those who raise concerns that they will not be victimised if they have a reasonable belief and the disclosure was made in good faith.

The policy will ensure that staff and others who raise concerns receive a response and are informed about how their concerns are being dealt with.

3. Policy

All employees at one time or another may have concerns about what is happening at work. Usually these concerns are easily resolved. However, when they are about unlawful conduct, financial malpractice, health and safety risks to the public or to other employees, damage to the environment, possible fraud or corruption, sexual or physical abuse of clients, or any other unethical conduct, it can be difficult to know what to do.

Employees may be worried about raising such issues or may want to keep the concerns to themselves, perhaps feeling it's none of their business or that it's only a suspicion. They may feel that raising the matter would be disloyal to colleagues, managers or to the Council. They may decide to say something but find that they have spoken to the wrong person or raised the issue in the wrong way and are not sure what to do next. They may also fear harassment or victimisation.

The Council is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. It expects its employees who have serious concerns about anything that is happening in the Council, to come forward and raise those concerns. The Council, however, recognises that employees need to be supported and have confidence that any concerns will be treated appropriately. The purpose of this Policy is to enable employees to raise concerns about such malpractice at an early stage and in the right way. The Council would rather matters were raised when just a concern rather than wait for proof.

This Policy is primarily for concerns where the interests of others or of the organisation itself are at risk.

Employees with concerns about their employment with the Council should raise these through the Grievance Procedure.

The message for employees is 'If in doubt - raise it!'

4. Procedure

Safeguards

1. The Council is committed to good practice and high standards and wants to be supportive of employees. The Council recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. If you raise a genuine concern under this policy, you should have nothing to fear because you will be doing your duty to your employer and those for whom you are providing a service.
2. The Council will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action to protect you when you raise a concern in good faith.
3. Any investigation into allegations of potential malpractice will not influence or be influenced by any disciplinary or redundancy procedures that already affect you.
4. All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal your identity if you so wish. At the appropriate time, however, you may need to come forward as a witness.
5. You should, whenever possible, put your name to your allegation as concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful. The Council will exercise discretion in considering anonymous allegations if the issue raised is sufficiently serious, e.g. involving individual or public safety or corruption, waste or other impropriety, and credible and there is a likelihood of confirming the allegation from other sources.
6. If you make an allegation in good faith but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against you. If, however, you make an allegation frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken against you.

How to raise a concern

7. It is normally expected that concerns will be raised in the first instance with the immediate line manager, Headteacher or Chairman of Governing Body. However if the matter is of an extremely sensitive or serious nature or management is believed to be involved it can be raised with the following: -
 - Head of Internal Audit : 01895 556132 (Ext: 6132)
 - Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer, 01895 250617 (Ext: 0617)
 - Corporate Director of Finance: 01895 556074 (Ext: 6074)
 - Chief Executive: 01895 250569 (Ext: 0569)
 - Head of Democratic Services, 01895 556743 (Ext: 6743)

- Corporate Fraud Investigation Manager, 01895 250369 (Ext: 0369)

Concerns can also be addressed to the confidential hotline number on 0800 389 8313 or e-mailed to: fraud@hillingdon.gov.uk

8. The above will also be able to provide advice/guidance on how to pursue matters of concern.
9. Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing. To make a written report it is suggested that the background and history of the concern with relevant dates is included and the reason for the particular concerns about the situation.
10. Reasonable grounds for concern will need to be demonstrated.
11. Employees may be accompanied at any meetings or interviews in connection with concerns raised by a trade union or other representative or a friend.

How the Council will respond

12. Once you have raised your concern, it will be looked into to assess initially what action should be taken.
13. As appropriate, matters raised may:
 - be investigated by management, the Monitoring Officer, internal audit, through the disciplinary process or referred for investigation through the Council's Standards Committee where the complaint is about the misconduct of Councillors.
 - be referred to the police
 - be referred to the external auditor
 - form the subject of an independent investigation.
14. In deciding how to deal with the concern raised, the overriding principle the Council will have in mind is the public interest. Concerns or allegations that fall within the scope of specific procedures e.g. child protection, will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures. Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation. If urgent action is required this will be taken before any investigation is conducted.
15. Within ten working days of a concern being raised, the person to whom the concern has been raised will acknowledge receipt in writing and indicate how the Council proposes to deal with the matter. If there is an ongoing investigation the person responsible for that investigation will provide updates on how the matter is progressing and inform the outcome of the investigation subject to any legal constraints.

16. The Council will take steps to minimise any difficulties that may be experienced as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, the Council will arrange for advice about the procedure and any support and counselling required.

The Responsible Officer

The Monitoring Officer has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this policy. That officer maintains a record of concerns raised and the outcomes, in a form, which does not endanger confidentiality, and will report as necessary to the Council.

External contacts

While the Council hopes this policy gives the reassurance needed to raise such matters internally, it recognises that there may be circumstances where matters can properly be reported outside bodies, such as the District Auditor or the police. The Union or Citizens Advice Bureau will be able to advise on such an option and on the circumstances in which to contact an outside body safely.