



**NEWCASTLE
UNDER LYME**
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Whistleblowing Policy 2019/20

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Introduction – What is Whistleblowing?

Sometimes whistleblowing is called speaking up or raising a concern. It is all about ensuring that if someone sees something wrong in the workplace, they are able to raise this within their organisation, or externally. Whistleblowing ultimately protects customers, staff, beneficiaries, and the organisation itself by identifying harm and wrong doing before it is too late.

People working within organisations are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong in the place in which they work. Workers should be watchful for illegal or unethical conduct and report anything of that nature that they become aware of. Newcastle Borough Council is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment, we encourage employees and others working at or for the Council who have serious concerns about any aspect of the Council's work to come forward and voice those concerns.

Aims and scope of the policy

This policy supports the Councils Anti-Fraud and Anti-Corruption Framework, Corporate Health and Safety Policy, and the Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy.

The policy applies to all employees, agency workers and contractors working on Council premises (for example, cleaners, builders and drivers). It also covers suppliers and those providing services under a contract with the Council in their own premises.

This policy aims to:

- provide avenues for you to raise concerns and receive feedback on any action taken;
- allow you to take the matter further if you are dissatisfied with the Council's response; and
- reassure you that you will be protected from reprisals or victimisation for whistleblowing, and will be supported throughout the process.

What to do if you have any concerns?

The earlier you express your concern, the easier it is to take action, and although you will not be expected to prove the truth of the allegation, you will need to be able to demonstrate to the person contacted that there are sufficient grounds for your concern.

If you have a concern, the Council hopes that you will be able to raise the matter with your line manager. However, if you feel unable to raise the matter with your line manager or if you believe that your line manager is involved in the concern, you should contact the Council's Internal Audit department.

The Council's Internal Audit department: Internal Audit, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, Castle House, Barracks Road, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire, ST5 1BL. Telephone: (01782) 742690/742124. Email: whistleblowing@newcastle-staffs.gov.uk For any concerns raised in writing please label these "PRIVATE and CONFIDENTIAL".

If you have followed these channels and you still have concerns or you feel that you are unable to discuss the matter with your line manager or Internal Audit please contact the Monitoring Officer (contact details can be found in the "Who is the Responsible Officer?" section below).

What safeguards are in place?

The law (Employment Rights Act 1996 and Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998) provides protection for workers who raise legitimate concerns about specified matters. These are called "qualifying disclosures". A qualifying disclosure is one made in the public interest by a worker who has a reasonable belief that:

- a criminal offence;
- a miscarriage of justice;
- an act creating risk to health and safety;
- an act causing damage to the environment;
- a breach of any other legal obligation; or
- concealment of any of the above

is being, has been, or is likely to be, committed. It is not necessary for the worker to have proof that such an act is being, has been, or is likely to be, committed - a reasonable belief is sufficient. The worker has no responsibility for investigating the matter - it is the Council's responsibility to look into the matter.

A person who makes such a protected disclosure has the right not to be dismissed, subjected to any other detriment or victimised because they have made a disclosure.

Responding to your concerns

The Council will, where possible, protect the identity of a notifying individual and not reveal their source at any time during the investigation. However, you may eventually be needed as a witness in disciplinary or criminal proceedings if necessary (if you are, the Council will arrange for you to be given advice about the procedure).

The action taken by the Council will depend on the nature of the concern.

The matters raised may:-

- be investigated internally;
- be referred to the Police;
- be referred to First Response at Staffs County Council in respect of safeguarding issues;
- be referred to the external auditor; or
- form an independent inquiry/investigation.

Within 10 working days of a concern being received, the Council will write to you:-

- acknowledging that the concern has been received;
- indicating how it proposes to deal with the matter;
- giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response;
- telling you whether any initial enquiries have been made; and
- telling you whether further investigations will take place; and if not, why not.

The amount of contact between the officers considering the issue and you will depend upon the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, further information will be sought from you.

The Council accepts that you need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed and looked into. Thus, subject to legal constraints, you will receive information about the outcomes of any investigations.

Who is the Responsible Officer?

The Council's "Monitoring Officer" is the Responsible Officer. Staffordshire County Council currently provides the Council with "Monitoring Officer" support. The Monitoring Officer has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this policy. They can be contacted on 01785 276198. If you feel you cannot raise your concerns with your line manager or the Council's Internal Audit department, then you should make contact with the Monitoring Officer.

A record will be maintained of all concerns raised together with the outcomes and will be reported as necessary to the Council.

How the matter can be taken further?

This policy is intended to provide you with an avenue to raise concerns within the Council. The Council hopes that you will have confidence in using the Whistleblowing procedure, however, if you are not, and if you feel it is right to take the matter outside the Council, the following are possible contact points:-

- The Council's External Auditors - Grant Thornton
- The Police

Further Advice

The Council pays an annual subscription to Protect (previously named Public Concern at Work) who are a registered charity, which gives our employees access to a confidential advice line. They have qualified legal staff to give help and advice and can be contacted on 020 3117 2520. They can also be contacted by email: mls@protect-advice.org.uk

Their website contains lots of information and advice in respect of whistleblowing: www.protect-advice.org.uk

Review of this Policy

It is important to keep this policy up-to-date with developments in the law and professional practice. This policy will be reviewed every two years and reported to the Audit and Standards Committee (unless any urgent need arises that requires an update before then).

Appendix A – Whistleblowing policy reporting form

Whistleblowing Policy Reporting Form

Newcastle Borough Council is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment we expect employees and others that we deal with who have concerns about any aspect of the Council's work to come forward and voice their concerns. If you wish to raise a concern in writing please use this pro-forma.

Background and history of the concern (giving relevant dates):

The reasons why you are particularly concerned about the situation:

(continue on a separate sheet if necessary)

You are encouraged to put your name to this report. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful but they may be considered. If you feel able to, please give your name and details below:

Name

Service

Contact Telephone Number

Date

PLEASE SEND THIS FORM TO YOUR LINE MANAGER OR ALTERNATIVELY INTERNAL AUDIT