



## Audit and Standards Committee Report

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**Report of:** Gillian Duckworth, Monitoring Officer

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**Date:** 20 January 2022

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**Subject:** Whistleblowing

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**Author of Report:** Claire Corneille, Head of HR

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### Summary:

This report

- Provides the Audit and Standards Committee with information on activity under the Whistleblowing Policy from April 2018 (when last reported) to the present date in accordance with the requirements of the Constitution (Appendix A)
  - Provides details of the plans to publicise the Whistleblowing Policy, as part of the planned approach to this and associated ways for staff to raise concerns.
  - Informs the Committee on the planned recruitment, support, training and development to equip a refocused group of Contact Advisors, as part of the promotion of ways to raise concerns.
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### Recommendations:

It is recommended that the Audit and Standards Committee:

- Note the information on the activity under the Whistleblowing Policy since April 2018.
  - Note the plans for publicising the Whistleblowing Policy and associated ways in which staff can raise concerns.
  - Note the plans for Contact Advisors
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**Background Papers:**      **None**

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**Category of Report:**      **OPEN**

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\* Delete as appropriate

## Statutory and Council Policy Checklist

<b>Financial Implications</b>
YES/NO - Cleared by:
<b>Legal Implications</b>
YES/NO - Cleared by:
<b>Equality of Opportunity Implications</b>
YES/NO - Cleared by:
<b>Tackling Health Inequalities Implications</b>
NO
<b>Human rights Implications</b>
NO:
<b>Environmental and Sustainability implications</b>
NO
<b>Economic impact</b>
NO
<b>Community safety implications</b>
NO
<b>Human resources implications</b>
NO
<b>Property implications</b>
NO
<b>Area(s) affected</b>
None
<b>Relevant Cabinet Portfolio Member</b>
Councillor Cate McDonald, Executive Member for Finance and Resources
<b>Is the item a matter which is reserved for approval by the City Council?</b>
NO
<b>Press release</b>
NO

## **WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY**

### **1. Introduction**

Sheffield City Council is committed to the highest standards of ethics, transparency, integrity and accountability. It seeks to conduct its affairs in a responsible manner taking into account the requirements of the proper use of public funds and the standards required in public life. If employees feel that this is not happening then the Council encourages them to tell us. This is called Whistleblowing.

The Council has a Whistleblowing Policy to enable employees to raise matters of concern that are in the public interest so that they may be investigated and where appropriate acted upon. There are additional ways in which colleagues can raise wider concerns, such as through Contact Advisors.

### **2. Current position**

The Council's current arrangements have been in place since 2016 and were last reported to this Committee in April 2018.

The number of concerns raised under the Whistleblowing Policy remains very low, although this is against a context of having a range of ways to raise concerns at all levels and an active Audit function, who work in partnership with HR to review allegations of inappropriate behaviours including fraud and criminal activities when identified / reported.

The allegations reported since April 2018 are detailed in Appendix 1.

The Director of Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer), Finance Manager (Internal Audit) and the Head of HR meet on a quarterly basis to review both the Whistleblowing and Financial Irregularities monitoring report, as part of the Council's governance arrangements.

### **3. Plans to publicise Whistleblowing, and associated ways to raise concerns**

Whilst monitoring and communications were put in place in 2018, since March 2020 the opportunity to continue to publicise the process for raising concerns, including whistleblowing, has reduced.

The varied way in which we have worked throughout the pandemic has minimised promotional opportunities. As we start to transition back into all

workplaces from February 2022, we have an opportunity to refocus our approach and publicise the various ways in which staff can raise concerns.

A targeted campaign, using a range of mediums including direct emails, narrative in bulletins, posters etc. will be used from April 2022.

#### **4. Contact Advisors**

Contact Advisors were originally introduced, as part of the Dignity and Respect at Work Policy and Procedure, to enable employees to access relevant advice and information and to help them to explore and understand various routes to raising concerns and resolving issues.

The role of the Contact Advisor was broadened to include support for people using this procedure or people who are subject to Whistleblowing investigations.

The number of Contact Advisors has reduced significantly in recent years, and we have an immediate issue in terms of staff being able to access support in this way.

Plans are being developed to refocus the Contact Advisor role, learning lessons from previous approaches and other organisations who have successfully provided similar opportunities (e.g., the Freedom to Speak Up Guardians within the NHS).

This will result in a targeted campaign, in January 2022, to recruit more Contact Advisors, who will be provided with specific training and ongoing development to support them in their role.

It is vital that we have these individuals in place prior to the promotion of whistleblowing and associated ways to raise concerns, hence the plans to promote these approaches from April 2022.

#### **5. Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Audit and Standards Committee:

- Note the information on the activity under the Whistleblowing Policy since April 2018.
- Note the plans for publicising the Whistleblowing Policy and associated ways in which staff can raise concerns.
- Note the plans for Contact Advisors.

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