



Audit & Governance Committee
24 March 2014

Whistle blowing update

Purpose of the report:

Audit and Governance Committee have requested a regular update on whistle blowing, and to keep the profile high through publicity and preventative measures and activities.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

1. The Committee notes the progress outlined in the report.
2. The Committee approves the promotional activities and preventative measures in section 8 of this report.
3. In future, reporting on whistle blowing to Audit & Governance Committee is done on an annual basis in March. This will be in conjunction with any related work on whistle blowing conducted by Internal Audit.

Introduction:

4. Since the last report in September 2013, usage of the service has remained fairly consistent. There has been a slight increase in the average number of calls at around 4.5 per month, and an average of 0.6 investigations compared to 3.1 calls and 1 investigation for the same period in 2011-12. This is comparable with other organisations who use Expolink.

5. Recent service activity - Expolink

Usage Table

2013 Month	Total no. of calls	Total requiring investigation	Main Incidents Reported	Directorate
Jul	11	0		

Aug	0	0		
Sep	6	2	Grievance against manager. Concerns regarding professional conduct	ASC C&C
Oct	4	0		
Nov	1	0		
Dec	5	2	Pay issue Bullying & Victimization	ASC CSF
TOTAL this period	27	4		

The higher number of calls in July 2013 relates to additions to previous reports, and requests for feedback on investigations which were highlighted in the previous report concerning an independent school.

Summary of recent live cases and outcomes reported via the whistle blowing service:

2013 Month	Nature of complaint	Outcome
Sept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allegations of H&S bad practice by allowing non SCC staff into the kitchen. Allegations of inappropriate management of complaints against an OH advisor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigation took place and no breach of H&S regulations was found Investigation has taken place and it was suggested that a discussion by all parties took place to resolve the issues.
Dec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allegation of bank holiday entitlement not being calculated correctly for all staff Allegations of bullying and victimisation by several staff members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigation has taken place and corrections have been made All parties have been contacted and discussions held. Clarification has been put in place regarding responsibilities. The caller is happy with the informal outcome.

6. Whistle blowing information searched by staff via s-net (intranet)

	s-net landing page	What happened next?
Number of s-net visits	322	151 ended session 76 downloaded policy 32 viewed flowchart 32 viewed Protection for whistle blowers 28 viewed Expolink page 10 viewed FAQs
Page views	495	
Unique visitors	283	

(Six months: August 13 – January 14)

7. Promotional activities

A mix of corporate communications channels is being used to continue to inform and engage the audience groups. This includes:

- A rolling programme of publicity to increase awareness of whistle blowing, as part of our People Strategy, linking to wellbeing
- Information on the s-net pages
- Details of the whistle blowing policy and Expolink's contact number is included in induction and STARS training
- Fairness champions continue to help promote the scheme and communicate key messages
- The whistle blowing service has been integrated into the Employee Benefits offer as part of the Total Reward package, which receives a high number of viewings on s-net and therefore helps to promote this service
- Expolink is highlighted in the annual benefits survey.

Schools

The importance of encouraging whistle blowing in schools is a regular agenda item on meetings with Babcock 4S.

Publicity includes:

- Awareness raising articles placed in the SOS briefings to School Bursars/HR Officers
- As a key part of the Schools Financial Value Standard, governors reassess the profile of the whistle blowing policy yearly
- Expolink promotional resources are provided on the Babcock 4S website, to encourage schools to promote the service
- As a result of the above, there is a steady flow of requests for promotional posters, queries about where to download the whistle blowing policy, and about the policy itself.

8. Future planned activities

- Working with Internal Audit, and other corporate functions, to adopt a joined up approach to any campaigns/initiatives around fraud
- A question and answer article will be placed on Chat zone (s-net) giving further details of the service and how to access it, together with other interventions such as fairness champions
- Whistle blowing promotion will be a topic at a future series of Bursar briefings for schools, to ensure awareness and encourage promotion throughout Surrey County Council schools
- An article will be published in the SOS (School Office Support) bulletin to raise awareness among teachers new to Surrey
- A short survey has been designed to check on employees' knowledge and understanding of the whistle blowing service, to help target future campaigns and will be publicised via Chat Zone
- Information on Expolink continues to be placed on payslips in 2014
- Work will be done to explore the issue of raising awareness of whistle blowing among suppliers.

Conclusions:

9. Awareness of whistle blowing continues to be raised across the workforce.

Financial and value for money implications

10. None.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

11. All equality strands will be applicable to ensure staff have access to reporting concerns, and the outcomes are monitored to ensure the overall well-being of staff. In addition the organisation/services will benefit from robust application of Strategy against Fraud & Theft. Any issues that arise through whistle blowing are addressed as they arise.

Risk Management Implications

12. None identified.

Next steps:

Identify future actions and dates.

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Sources/background papers: n/a.