



AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
6 December 2012

WHISTLE BLOWING UPDATE

SUMMARY:

Audit and Governance Committee have requested an update on whistle blowing every six months. Since the last report, usage of the service continues to be fairly consistent, with a slight decrease in the average number of calls at around 3.5 per month and 4 investigations compared to 5 for the same period in 2011-12.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Committee is invited to note the progress outlined in the report.

RECENT SERVICE ACTIVITY:

Usage Table – May 2012 to October 2012

Month	Total no. of calls	Main Incidents Reported	Directorate
May 12	3	No incidents arising from calls	
June 12	3	No incidents arising from calls	
July 12	2	No incidents arising from calls	
Aug 12	3	Allegations of using a service user's computer for personal purchases, and cleaning standards not being maintained	ASC
Sept 12	3	No incidents arising from calls	
Oct 12	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allegations of bullying and physical assault made by a service user • Allegations of purchasing equipment for personal use • Employee wanting advice on safeguarding allegations made against them 	CSF C&C CSF

TOTAL this period	21		
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Summary of recent live cases and outcomes reported via the whistle blowing service:

Month	Nature of complaint	Outcome
Aug 2012	Allegations of employee using a service user's computer for personal purchases and that cleaning standards of the building not being maintained.	Investigation completed. Guidelines not breached therefore no case to answer. Decision made to re-issue clarification guidelines on computer use. Standards of cleanliness will continue to be monitored.
Oct 2012	Allegations of bullying and physical assault made by service user.	A thorough investigation has been completed with the recommendation that no formal action is taken. Employee referred to employee assistance programme and supported on return to work.
Oct 2012	Allegations of purchasing equipment for personal use.	Audit made aware and investigation completed on information supplied. No evidence found. Individual was advised that without further details no further investigation can take place.

PROMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES

By using a mix of corporate communications channels we 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
- A further publicity programme is planned for December 2012, to promote the whistle blowing service on s-net, 'Inside Surrey', with a further three week campaign on the s-net carousel (centre front page)
- 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
- Information on Expolink will be placed on payslips every two months in 2013
- Each directorate communications representative has been asked to include an item on whistle blowing in their bulletins and newsletters
- The Department of Health has a new, free whistle blowing helpline service for NHS and social care staff who have concerns about patient care
- In addition, there is an external service - Public Concern at Work – which provides independent and confidential advice to workers who are unsure whether or how to raise a public interest concern

- Actions arising from the mini-survey are being addressed in Change and Efficiency, with the completion of a comprehensive, detailed survey on bullying and harassment. This will collect qualitative data and once the results are known these will be referred to the next committee, where appropriate.

Schools

The importance of encouraging whistle blowing in schools is a regular agenda item on meetings with Babcock 4S, (the next meeting is on 29 November).

Publicity includes:

- The provider of HR services to schools, Babcock 4S, emailed information to all Surrey schools alerting them to the new policy
- Babcock 4S have highlighted the whistle blowing service to School Bursars/HR Officers in their Surrey briefings
- The council will include an article on whistle blowing and promote Expolink in the next edition of the 'Surrey Governor' newsletter, which is being issued in early Spring 2013
- A section referring to the new policy has been included in the schools finance newsletter
- Having a whistle blowing policy in place and confirming that this has been communicated to staff is also a key part of the Schools Financial Value Standard and governors reassess the profile of the 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 has been a notable increase in queries about where to download the whistle blowing policy and about the policy itself.

CONTRACT RENEWAL:

The supplier (Expolink) has agreed to provide the same whistle blowing service independently to all districts and boroughs who choose to take up this service, at no additional cost to either Surrey County Council or the districts and boroughs. This offer is for the same duration as our own contract, ie five years, commencing April 2012, and the relevant clause has been written in the core contract to reflect this core offer.

IMPLICATIONS

Financial :

There are no direct financial implications in this report.

Equalities :

The policies referred to in this report have been updated following consultation with the recognised trades unions and in accordance with the Council's commitment to equality and diversity.

Risk Management :

There are no direct risk management implications in this report.

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