

Audit & Governance Committee
26 May 2016

Whistle Blowing Update

Purpose of the report:

To provide Audit and Governance Committee with a complete summary of whistle blowing investigations, promotional and developmental activity throughout 2015-16.

Recommendations:

1. It is recommended that the Committee:
 - a) Notes the progress outlined in the report;
 - b) Approves the creation of an annual staff engagement plan in order to maintain current awareness of the whistle blowing policy, and to promote confidence in the confidentiality of the service.

Introduction:

2. This report provides a summary of all whistle blowing promotions and whistle blowing investigations that have been carried out across the organisation during the last financial year. It combines data held by Human Resources & Organisational Development (HR&OD), Legal & Democratic Services and Internal Audit.

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

3. The following table shows the activity of staff accessing information on whistle blowing on the intranet, which aligns to promotional activity and shows a healthy level of enquiry about the policy.

S-net page visits	What happened next?
S-net visits 2015-16 : 2278	1310 ended session 216 downloaded policy 100 viewed flowchart 77 downloaded whistle blowing leaflet 76 viewed Ending Bullying & Harassment page 72 viewed FAQs 34 viewed Expolink website
S-net visits 2014-15 : 1701	942 ended session 173 downloaded policy 111 viewed flowchart 88 viewed FAQs 49 viewed Ending Bullying & Harassment page 47 viewed Expolink website

Improving Management of Cases

4. In August 2015, a new Case Management System (CMS) was launched for HR Advisors, to record data about each case they are managing. The system allows for a systematic record to be created of each case from the time it is logged, through any investigation process to the time it is closed. All whistle blowing cases are explicitly logged on CMS and are managed in the same process, using the same policies and processes as general HR cases.
5. A software feature of CMS allows cases to be viewed only by nominated HR Advisors, which ensures that confidentiality of a report is maintained. This will improve our overview of all whistle blowing cases - whether investigated by Human Resources or another service.

Analysis of Expolink activity 2015-16:

6. During the autumn of 2015-16 we introduced two new options for whistle blowers to submit a report anonymously to Expolink – reports can now be submitted confidentially online, or to a bespoke email address that Expolink manages for Surrey County Council.
7. Throughout the latter part of the financial year we have experienced an increase in the usage of this service. This may reflect the raised profile of the whistle blowing policy on the home page of s-net, or perhaps that people felt more confident to report using one of these new options.
8. A summary of all Expolink activity is provided below, together with a comparison of activity during 2014-15.

Month	Total no. of calls 2014-15	Total no of investigations 2014-15	Total no. of calls 2015-16	Total no of investigations 2015-16
April	2	0	1	0
May	11	3	3	1
June	2	1	7	2
July	2	0	5	1
August	2	1	3	1
September	4	0	3	1
October	3	2	3	2
November	4	0	3	2
December	2	0	1	0
January	1	1	0	0
February	1	0	10	8
March	0	0	6	1
Totals	34	8	45	19
Average per month	2.8	0.6	3.7	1.6
Ratio of calls which become investigations.		1 : 4.2		1 : 2.4

The ratio of calls which become investigations shows improved quality of valid calls and conversion rates as well as an increase in the number of calls.

Analysis of whistle blowing reports received 2015-16:
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9. A summary of all whistle blowing cases that have been investigated by HR, Internal Audit and Legal & Democratic Services is provided below. No referrals were made to Legal and Democratic Services.

Human Resources

Source	Service	Allegation
Expolink	CEO	IMT security issue
Expolink	CSF Schools	Substance abuse
Expolink	BS	Victimisation
Expolink	CSF Schools	Fraudulent practice
Expolink	ASC	Unprofessional practice
Expolink	C&C	Unprofessional practice
Expolink	CEO	Colleague being intimidated by a member of the public
Expolink	CSF	Fraudulent practice
Expolink	CSF	Fraudulent practice
Expolink	ASC	Unprofessional behaviour
Expolink	CSF Schools	Fraudulent practice
Expolink	E&I	Unprofessional behaviour
Expolink	CSF	Unprofessional behaviour
Expolink	ASC	Unprofessional behaviour

Internal Audit

Source	Service	Allegation
Direct	ASC	Misuse of money
Direct	ASC	Unfair employment
Direct	BS	Financial misstatement and misconduct
Direct	BS	Unfair employment
Direct	C&C	Fraudulent use of Blue Badge
Direct	C&C	Fraudulent use of Blue Badge
Direct	CEO	Financial irregularity
Direct	CSF	False reporting
Expolink	Property	Fraud
Expolink	CSF	Corruption
Expolink	E&I	Corruption
Expolink	BS	Unprofessional practice
Expolink	Not disclosed	Not disclosed

Summary of cases investigated 2015-16

Source	Service	No of reports
Expolink	HR	14
Direct	HR	0
Expolink	Internal Audit	5
Direct	Internal Audit	8
Expolink	Legal & Democratic Services	0
Direct	Legal & Democratic Services	0
Total		27

Benchmarking:

10. Given the nature of this kind of activity, there is very little benchmarking data available. Expolink has advised that in a comparison with its other private sector clients of a similar size, Surrey receives an above average number of calls and reports. This outcome could reflect our ongoing and extensive promotion of the service.
11. We will continue to review benchmarking data, as and when it becomes available.

Summary of promotional activity 2015-16:

12. During the summer of 2015 a considerable amount of work was taken to refresh awareness of Surrey's whistle blowing facility and to make sure that reporting processes were still fit for purpose. As a result of this activity we have carried out work to improve communication, access and awareness of whistle blowing – see Annex A.

Financial and value for money implications

13. There are no financial impacts identified as a result of this report. Having whistle blowing procedures in place helps the local authority to identify and tackle issues which could otherwise have financial implications.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

14. 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 our Strategy against Fraud & Theft. Any issues that arise through whistle blowing are addressed as they arise.

Risk Management Implications

15. There are no risks identified as a result of this report. Having whistle blowing procedures in place helps the local authority to identify and manage risks.

Next steps:

16. A whistle blowing process flowchart, which explains the enquiry and investigation process for each whistle blowing allegation, is currently being reviewed and an updated version will be posted on s-net. This document is aligned to our whistle blowing policy and is referenced in s-net and policy text.
17. Since the inception of CMS, a monthly report on all HR case activity is produced for review by the HR Leadership Team (HRLT). This report will enable HR whistle blowing activity to be reviewed on a monthly basis, and HR, Legal & Democratic Services and Internal Audit whistle blowing activity together to be reviewed on a quarterly basis.

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Communication

- The whistle blowing leaflet (see Annex B) was re-branded and updated with:
 - clearer text in places,
 - a new link to Expolink's online reporting facility,
 - a new Expolink email address for Surrey users.
- The leaflet has been added to electronic packs for all new starters and all those who are changing post, which ensures that people are made aware of this service at the time that they join the organisation and receive reminders of the service when changing post.
- The new leaflet was circulated to all staff by email during August and was also sent to A&G Committee members.
- Whistle Blowing has had prominent promotion on s-net. It has been featured twice on the s-net carousel and is now a permanent heading under Working for Surrey on the home page of s-net, carrying a link to the s-net policy page.

Access

- A brief reminder about the service and the updated leaflet were included in ASC, CSF, E&I and HR&OD newsletters.
- The wording of the leaflet was adapted slightly to make it relevant for Schools staff and was circulated to all Schools via the Schools newsletter during winter 2015 (see Annex C). The revised wording assures that "Arrangements for whistle blowing are covered by individual school's procedures to reflect their respective governance arrangements. Academy schools have their own local arrangements for reporting issues."
- Surrey's s-net pages were updated with the new link to Expolink's online reporting facility and Expolink's new email address for Surrey users. The new leaflet was also posted on s-net.
- The Surrey website page, [Strategy against Fraud & Corruption](#), has been updated to ask non members of staff to phone or write to the Contact Centre if they want to raise an issue. On the external website, only the freephone number for Expolink has been given.
- A set of Guidelines on the process to follow when receiving a whistle blowing report has been created. The guidelines also outline the process to follow when further information is required from a caller.

Process

- Authorised report recipients are Ken Akers, Tess Corlett, Louise Savage, Rakhi Saigal, and Bella Smith. The primary recipient is Tess Corlett.
- The process for receiving calls was updated in March 2015 to facilitate an instance, where, if a caller specifically requests that HR does not receive a report, it can be submitted to Legal & Democratic Services (via Sue Lewry-Jones) or Internal Audit (via Ann Charlton).
- Expolink's welcome statement and screen guidance (that their staff refer to when receiving a call) have been reviewed and updated. We have refreshed the listing of Surrey schools and academies and also the SCC sites from which we can receive reports.

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