

Audit & Governance Committee
10 July 2024

Annual Whistleblowing Report 2023/24

Purpose of the report:

This report presents the annual whistleblowing report of the Council to the Audit and Governance Committee to provide transparency and accountability.

The report summarises the whistleblowing activity over the last year and analyses the effectiveness of the Council's process and system.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee:

1. Review the contents of the Annual Whistleblowing report to satisfy themselves that the governance arrangements are operating effectively; and
2. Make any recommendations for improvement.

Introduction

1. The Council is required to have an effective whistleblowing policy and arrangement in place. The annual report was previously reported to the Audit and Governance Committee in July 2023, and it was agreed to provide an updated report on an annual basis, reporting the results of the previous financial year.

Whistleblowing Annual Report 2023/24

2. As part of its governance arrangements the Council must ensure that effective arrangements for Whistleblowing are in place to which officers, staff and all those contracting with or appointed by the authority have access.
3. An effective and positive whistleblowing culture has the following advantages:
 - Detects and deters wrongdoing.
 - Provides information to managers so they can make decisions and contain the risk.

- Demonstrates to stakeholders that Surrey County council is serious about good governance.
- Reduces the chance of anonymous or malicious leaks.
- Reduces the chance of Legal claims against the Council; and
- Clear whistleblowing arrangements are likely to help with a defence under the Bribery Act 2010.

4. The annual report is attached at Annex A for the Committee's consideration.

5. The Governance Panel, The Risk Governance Group and the Whistleblowing monitoring group, which meets quarterly, has previously considered the report. These are informal meetings of the officers within the Council to discuss operation matters of governance, one being the statutory officer meeting.

Implications

6. Financial

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. Continued improvements in governance will support the delivery of the council's objectives.

7. Equalities

There are no direct equalities implications of this report.

8. Risk management

Strong whistleblowing arrangements support the council's commitment to good governance and the effective delivery of services and achievement of objectives.

Conclusions

9. The Annual Whistleblowing report provides assurance that the system and process for recording and monitoring whistleblowing cases is maintained and reviewed on a quarterly basis by the Monitoring Officer, Internal Audit, the People Consultancy Lead and the Governance Team responsible for maintaining the whistleblowing reports.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer:

10. The report complies with Council Officer Code of Conduct as set out in the Council Constitution under Part 6 Codes and Protocols. There are no immediate legal implications associated with this report. However, the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 (PIDA) amended the Employment Rights Act 1996 ("the Act") create a framework for whistleblowing across the private, public, and voluntary sectors. The Act provides individuals in the workplace with protection from victimisation where they make a protected disclosure about malpractice or wrongdoing at work in accordance with the Act's

provisions. The Council's Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure gives effect to this statutory requirement.

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| Next steps: |
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11. Any actions and recommendations from the Audit & Governance Committee will be considered for future reports.

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Sources/background papers:
Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure

Annexes/Appendices:
Annex A - Governance Report - Whistleblowing activity Financial Year
2023/24

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