

HR Governance Report

Whistleblowing activity Financial Year 2023/24

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to summarise whistleblowing activity during the financial year 2023/24, and to explain its monitoring and governance. The report provides an annual report of the Council's whistleblowing arrangements and a review of the Whistleblowing Policy. The report is being presented to the Risk Governance Group, which includes the Chief Executive, the Chief Internal Auditor, the Interim Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Services (Section 151 Officer), the Director of Law and Governance (Monitoring Officer) and the Director of People and Change. It will then be presented as a formal report to the Audit Governance Committee.

Shella-Marie Smith, Director of People & Change

CONTEXT

Whistleblowing allegations can be received either in written format to a senior officer, or through Navex Global, an external service which allows employees to raise a concern about an aspect of the council, their service or their team, in complete confidentiality. Allegations can be made anonymously to the confidential reporting hotline provided by Navex Global online, or by telephone.

An advisor within the HR Governance team within People & Change is the primary recipient of reports via Navex Global. They note the allegation, record it and determine whether the case should be investigated by People & Change, Internal Audit, or the Monitoring Officer. Any allegation that involves a potential instance of fraud – which may include someone not working their full hours, or submitting false time or travel claims for example – is investigated initially by Internal Audit.

Any whistleblowing allegation regarding HR practice or employees working in People & Change is investigated by the Monitoring Officer directly.

Receipt is acknowledged to the whistle-blower within 14 days of Navex Global receiving a whistleblowing report and further updates are provided after 28 days and once the case is closed. All correspondence is conveyed via Navex Global, always maintaining the anonymity of the whistle-blower.

Full information, including the policy and a flowchart of the lifecycle of a whistleblowing allegation, is available on SCC Info under [Whistleblowing](#). The Whistleblowing Policy is also incorporated into the employee code of conduct which has recently been reviewed and updated and approved by Full Council in May 2024.

In addition, communication campaigns to all staff occur four times a year to promote the service.

SCRUTINY

Whistleblowing cases are investigated by either People & Change, Internal Audit, the Monitoring Officer, or a combination of these depending on the nature of the allegation and the route by which the allegation has been made. Allegations about staff working in Twelve15 (Commercial Services) are directed to the Twelve15 HR division and allegations about teaching staff are currently managed by the Assistant HR Business Partner in the SCC HR team for Schools, in conjunction with the Area Schools Officer and the Chairs of Governors, where appropriate.

Officers from Internal Audit, People & Change and the Monitoring Officer meet on a quarterly basis to review recent whistle blowing activity including trends and patterns and related issues, such as promotion of the policy. Traffic to and from the SCC Info page is also reviewed at these meetings.

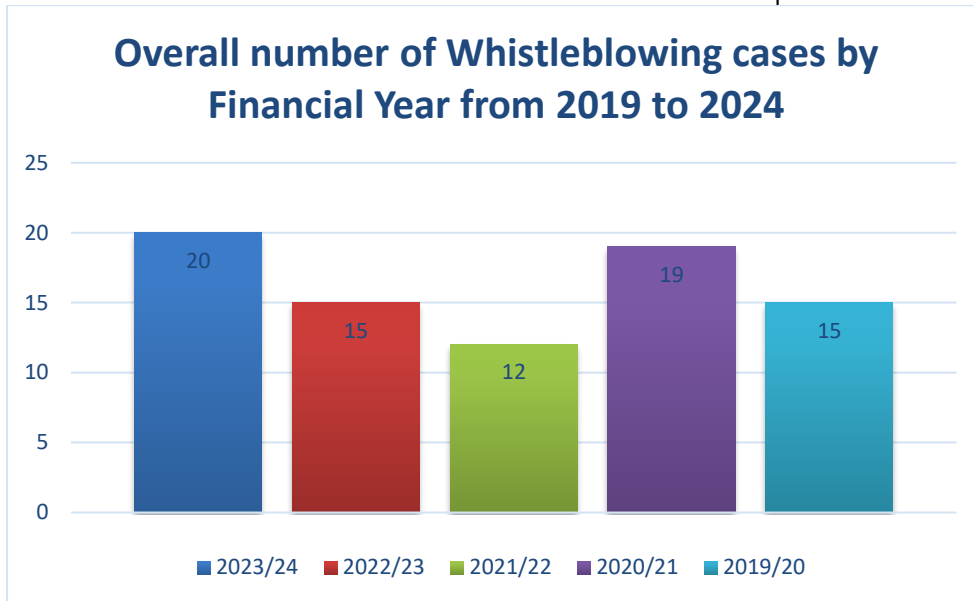
SUMMARY OF WHISTLEBLOWING ACTIVITY FY 2023/24

In financial year 2023/24 there was a slight increase in allegations, in comparison to the activity of the previous financial year, maintaining a reasonable number of reported cases and in line with previous years, providing reasonable assurance that people understand how to report a whistleblowing case.

An increase of communications campaigns in April, June (World Whistleblowers Day), December 2023 and March 2024 and new updated policies being circulated has resulted in an expected rise in the number of referrals. Within the activity summary overleaf, “Direct” refers to reports received in writing or by telephone to a council officer, and “Navex Global” refers to reports received through the confidential reporting hotline.

Comparison of overall whistleblowing activity FY 2019/20 to FY 2023/24

2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
20	15	12	19	15



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Breakdown of Cases

Whistleblowing Cases	Grievance cases	Number of repeated cases submitted	Number of cases submitted on Navex
20	78	1	17

There were a total number of 20 whistleblowing cases received in the FY 2023/24. 17 of those case were submitted via Navex and 3 of the cases were received directly to officers via email.

There were separately 78 grievances raised by employees. These are included to show the distinction between casework handled as whistleblowing and grievances and highlight effective management of each type of concern.

1 whistleblowing case was referred to borough council demonstrating strong working procedures with our borough council colleagues.

Two of the 20 whistleblowing cases were regarding schools.

Number of Allegations

The tables below show pending cases and cases which have been closed in the FY 2023/24.

Pending Cases:

Some whistleblowing cases can take longer than others to conclude due to various factors related to their complexity and can lead to extended timelines for resolution.

Case number	Date received	Directorate	Allegation	Status	Referred to
2	27/06/2023	Children, Families & Learning	Corruption and nepotism	OPEN	HR PEOPLE CONSULTANT & AUDIT
57	07/02/2024	Environment, Transport & Infrastructure	Fraud	OPEN	HR PEOPLE CONSULTANT & AUDIT
59	26/03/2024	Children, Families & Learning	Product Quality Concern	OPEN	HR PEOPLE CONSULTANT
61	28/03/2024	Children, Families & Learning	Policy Issues	OPEN	HR PEOPLE CONSULTANT

Closed Cases

Case number	Date received	Directorate	Allegation	Outcome	Date closed
45	20/04/2023	Health, Wellbeing & Adult Social Care	Employee relations	TBC	17/05/2023
46	18/05/2023	Children, Families & Learning	Employee relations	Investigation has been completed. Due to the confidentiality, findings of the case cannot be shared.	18/05/2023
47	22/05/2023	Schools	Workplace violence/ Threats	Forwarded to be progressed with the school	23/05/2023
1	13/06/2023	Environment, Transport & Infrastructure	Streetlighting	Internal audit carried out an investigation and found that no further action is required no case to answer	TBC
48	14/06/2023	Resources	Discrimination	All resource IDs have a 'Sex' record against them. This is recorded in the Recruitment process.	18/08/2023
49	12/07/2023	Resources	Policy Issues	Investigation has been completed but findings cannot be shared due to confidentiality reasons.	11/09/2023
3	06/09/2023	Health, Wellbeing & Adult Social Care	Fraud	Case closed and no case to answer. No	06/09/2023

HR Governance Report – Whistleblowing activity FY2023/24

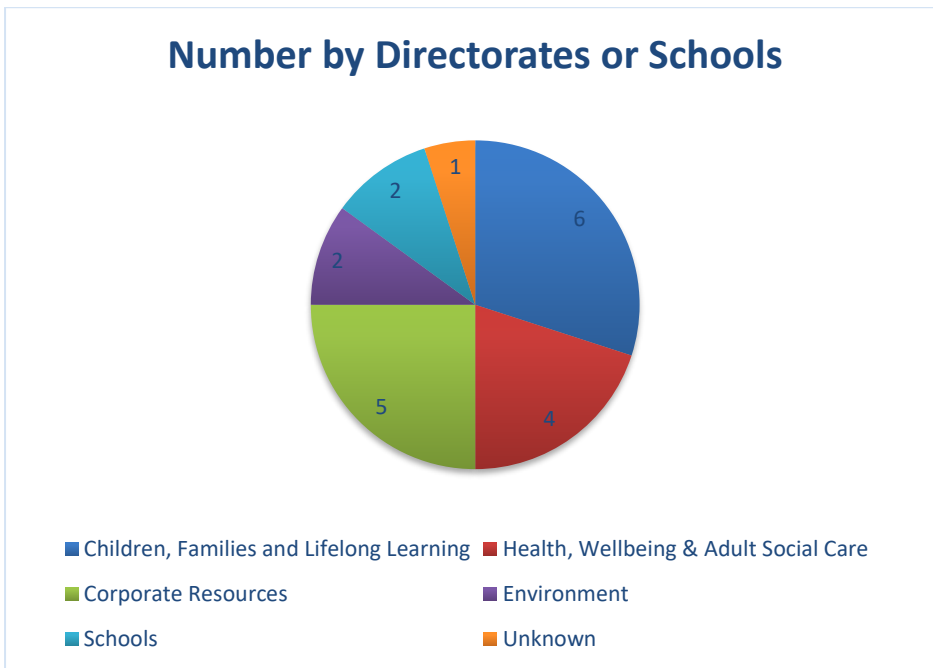
				further action required	
50	12/09/2023	Health, Wellbeing & Adult Social Care	Employee relations	TBC	TBC
51	14/09/2023	Surrey, Fire and Rescue	Fraud Conduct	Investigation has been completed but findings cannot be shared due to confidentiality reasons.	09/01/2024
52	15/09/2024	Children, Families & Learning	Employee relations	Case falls out of the scope for WB. Case has now been dealt with as a grievance	06/10/2023
53	08/11/2023	Schools	Theft or misuse of company assets or services	Whistleblower gave consent to speak to the schools COG so that they could share details and case could be investigated	05/12/2023
54	19/11/2023	Resources, Surrey, Fire & Rescue	Breach in policy	Allowed to pass a promotional process without completing core competencies	13/12/2023
56	17/01/2024	Unknown	Fraud –	Referred to Borough Council as related to private housing rent	14/12/2023
55	05/12/2023	Children, Families & Learning	Fraud Insurance Claims	Insufficient information	15/12/2023
58	26/02/2024	Health, Wellbeing & Adult Social Care	Safety Issues and sanitisation	Investigation has been completed; findings cannot be shared due to the confidential nature of the case.	TBC
60	27/03/2024	Resources	Discrimination	Preliminary review conducted by the Monitoring Officer who concluded there was not enough evidence to support the allegation therefore no formal investigation considered. No case to answer	19/04/2024

Number of allegations received broken down by Directorate or School FY 2023-24

A summary of total number of cases by directorate and schools is featured in the table and graph below.

	Number of cases
Children, Families and Lifelong Learning	6
Health, Wellbeing & Adult Social Care	4
Corporate Resources & SFRS	5
Environment, Infrastructure and Growth	2
Chief Executive Office	0
Schools	2
Unknown	1
TOTAL	20

Number by Directorates or Schools



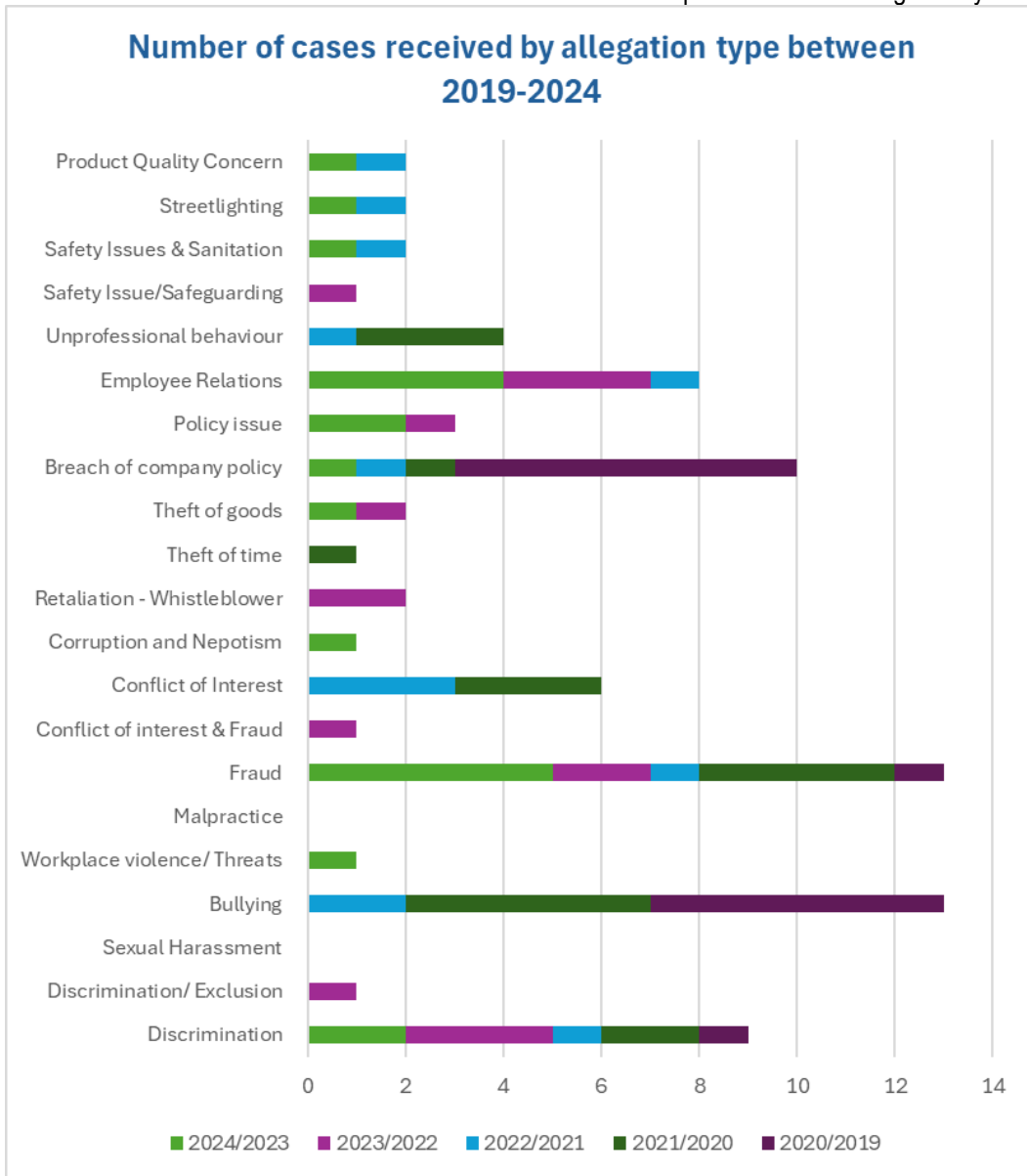
The reports submitted were mainly concerning specific areas in Children, Families, Lifelong Learning (CFLL), Corporate Resources and Health, Wellbeing & Adult Social Care (HWASC), 3 of our largest directorates. The cases reviewed did not reveal any major issues or concerns.

Number of cases received by allegation type between 2019 - 2024

HR Governance Report – Whistleblowing activity FY2023/24

Financial Year	2024/2023	2023/2022	2022/2021	2021/2020	2020/2019
Discrimination	2	3	1	2	1
Discrimination/ Exclusion	0	1	0	0	0
Sexual Harassment	0	0	0	0	0
Bullying	0	0	2	5	6
Workplace violence/ Threats	1	0	0	0	0
Malpractice	0	0	0	0	0
Fraud	5	2	1	4	1
Conflict of interest & Fraud	0	1	0	0	0
Conflict of Interest	0	0	3	3	0
Corruption and Nepotism	1	0	0	0	0
Retaliation - Whistleblower	0	2	0	0	0
Theft of time	0	0	0	1	0
Theft of goods	1	1	0	0	0
Breach of company policy	1	0	1	1	7
Policy issue	2	1	0	0	0
Employee Relations	4	3	1	0	0
Unprofessional behaviour	0	0	1	3	0
Safety Issue/Safeguarding	0	1	0	0	0
Safety Issues & Sanitation	1	0	1	0	0
Streetlighting	1	0	1	0	0
Product Quality Concern	1	0	1	0	0
Total	20	15	13	19	15

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Comparison of Grievance versus whistleblowing cases 2021 to present day with the relevant headcount for each directorate

The below table shows the number of grievance and whistleblowing cases compared to the headcount of the directorates.

		FY 22/23	FY 23/24
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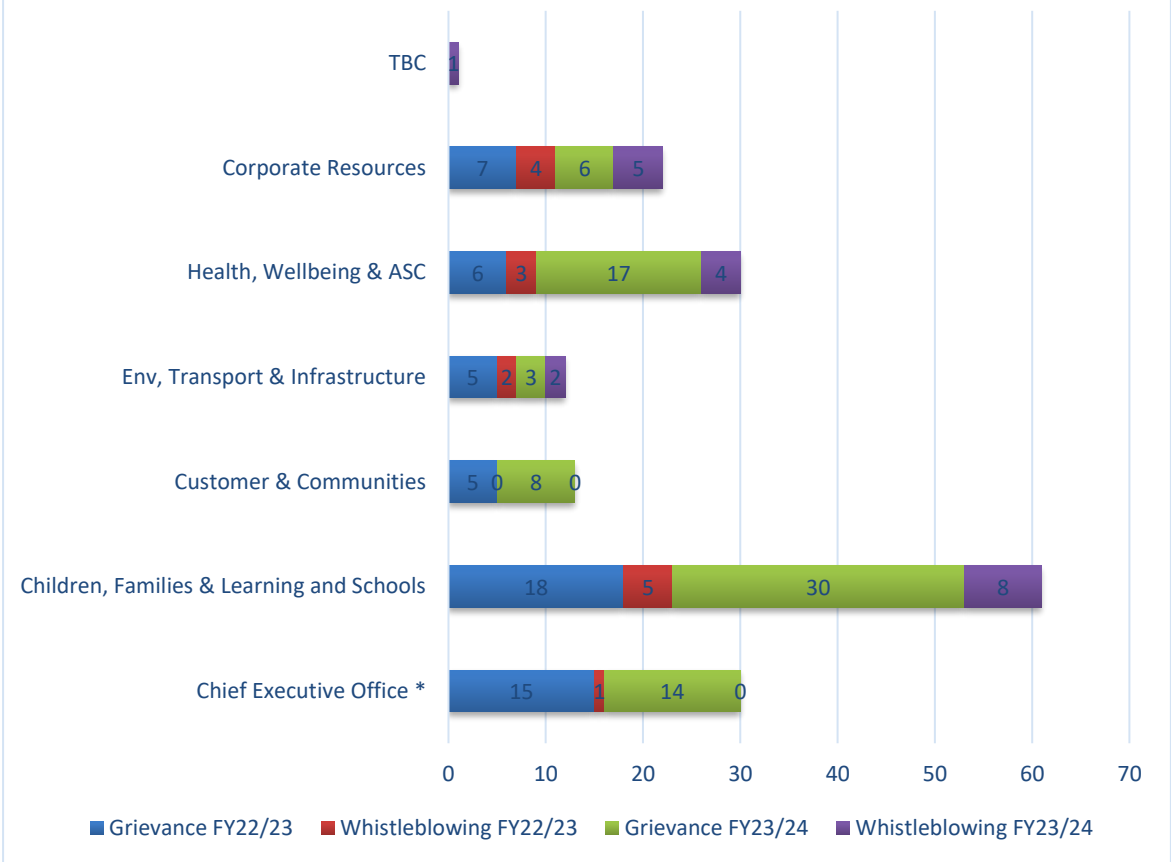
HR Governance Report – Whistleblowing activity FY2023/24

Directorate	Headcount (as of 31 March 2024)	Grievance FY22/23 (Numbers & % of headcount)	Whistleblowing FY22/23 (Numbers & % of headcount)	Grievance FY23/24 (Numbers & % of headcount)	Whistleblowing FY23/24 (Numbers & % of headcount)
Chief Executive Office *	939	15 (1.6%)	1 (0.1%)	14 (1.5%)	0
Children, Families & Learning and Schools	3891	18 (0.5%)	5 (0.1%)	30 (0.8%)	6(0.2%)
Customer & Communities	1394	5 (0.4%)	0	8 (0.6%)	0
Env, Transport & Infrastructure	1061	5 (0.5%)	2 (0.2%)	3 (0.3%)	2 (0.2%)
Health, Wellbeing & ASC	2185	6 (0.3%)	3 (0.1%)	17 (0.8%)	4 (0.2%)
Corporate Resources	1467	7 (0.5%)	4 (0.3%)	6 (0.2%)	5 (0.3%)
Surrey Schools **	7479	N/A	1 (0.01%)	N/A	2 (0.03%)
Unknown					1
Total	18,416	56 (0.3%)	16 (0.1%)	78 (0.4%)	20 (0.1%)

***SFRS headcount numbers are included in CEX figures prior to the service move into its own directorate.**

**** No grievance numbers available for schools as managed by various external HR providers.**

Number of Grievance and Whistleblowing cases FY 22/24



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INTERPRETATION OF ACTIVITY

There has been an increase in cases during the FY 2023/24. There have been no bullying whistleblowing allegations in 2023/24, which has previously been consistently the highest allegation type over the previous years and a rise in Employee Relations allegations. This highlights the effectiveness of promotions of the Grievance Resolution Policy, Ending of Bullying and Harassment Policy and the Whistleblowing Policy and successful mediating of potential bullying allegations. It indicates that there has been an improvement in workplace culture suggesting anti bullying initiatives are effective and employees are more aware and willing to raise concerns reflecting an open and communicative workplace environment.

Comparison with other councils

Figure 1- The table below shows a comparison of whistleblowing activity with other councils.

Year	Surrey	Brighton & Hove	Hampshire	East Sussex	West Sussex
Headcount 23/24 (Approx)	18,416	9124	13,300	8,000	5,100
2019-2020	15	15	0	2	1
2020-2021	19	9	3	2	1
2021-2022	12	11	3	2	1
2022-2023	15	13	0	1	1
2023-2024	20 (0.1%)	N/A	1 (0.001%)	3 (0.04%)	N/A
Total	81		7	10	

Surrey County Council has the highest rate of whistleblowing activity whereas, Hampshire has the lowest rate. The number of cases across Hampshire, East Sussex and West Sussex Council is low and could be due to under reporting. We consistently have the highest rate of activity but a healthy number in comparison to council size.

RECOMMENDATIONS / REQUESTS

The HR Governance team should continue with the communication exercises to further promote the whistleblowing service on SCC intranet.

Planned exercises.

- Continued awareness with added dates for World Whistleblowing Day and National Whistleblowing Day.
- 3 further reminders booked quarterly with internal communications to promote awareness on SharePoint.
- Posters to be circulated for SCC buildings such as homes, schools and offices.
- E-learning course for new starters
- Whistleblowing information added to provisional offer pack for new starters
- Increased communications of Code of Conduct policy
- Exit Survey Reporting to monitor any concerns that might be linked to either grievances or whistleblowing cases.
- New Case Management System providing insights and reports on overall grievances, employee relations casework and whistleblowing report follow ups.

The communication of the Grievance Policy, Ending of Bullying and Harassment Policy and Whistleblowing Policy have proved successful in increasing Council awareness. New cases of Whistleblowing were reported within a few weeks of the awareness posts going live on SCC Daily with grievances now taking the correct route.

There are no major concerns that malpractice in the workplace is an issue, although People & Change continues to monitor trends and ensure closure of cases in an appropriate and timely way.

In order to mitigate the challenge of assessing performance of the whistleblowing process (as low numbers of allegations could mean there is very little irregularity within the Council, or it could mean lack of awareness of the Whistleblowing Policy) a continued and improved communications plan is in place to support awareness, and the HR Business Partners also support services to understand best practice with regards to employee relations to reduce the number of whistleblowing cases in areas such as bullying, harassment and time management.

An e-learning quick-link for whistleblowing is being created and will form part of the employee induction pack. The module will be highlighted to managers and employees together with the Code of Conduct, which will also be promoted to joiners of the Council.

A new case management system (CMS) is live and being managed by the People Consultancy team. The CMS has the functionality to report on whistleblowing cases

and captures all cases that may not be submitted through Navex Global. Regular meetings are to be held with the HR Governance team and People Consultancy to ensure timely and effective handling of these cases to maintain trust and encourage individuals to come forward.

The exit survey reporting provides an overview of issues within directorates where focus can be enhanced, and relevant policies and communications can be targeted.

CONCLUSION

The report sets out the volume of whistleblowing across Surrey County Council. It indicates that although a higher number of cases are reported than other councils, this is interpreted as a healthy number and a sign of strength that the p of policies is working effectively and the relationship between HR Governance and People Consultancy works well. The communications and awareness campaigns are showing to be effective and the quarterly discussions with People & Change, Internal Audit and Monitoring Officer work well to identify trends and patterns. Regular reviews between the HR Governance team and People Consultancy will prove effective and improve an already strong process.

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