



Whistleblowing - An Employee Guide

What is Whistleblowing ?

Whistleblowing is reporting something that you are aware of that you think or know is wrong that affects the Council. You must report any major concerns you have.

This is a responsibility we all have whether a casual employee cleaning the offices, working at a swimming pool in Holsworthy or employed as the Finance Manager.

What sort of things might be reported ?

Fraud – this means someone is deliberately misleading the Council in order to gain an advantage. For example someone with the power to authorise invoices might manage to submit a false invoice for goods that the Council hasn't received.

Bribery – this means any act involved in offering or receiving a bribe or other inducement to influence a decision. For example trying to bribe a Councillor in order to obtain planning permission.

Collusion - this means two or more people have privately arranged that one of them will gain an improper advantage. For example 3 contractors could come to an agreement that 2 of them will submit inflated prices so the third contractor is more likely to win work from the Council.

Probity – this is about making sure that the right things happen, so that we protect honesty, truth, openness and trust. Anything that isn't in line with probity should be reported.

Each year Fraud within the public sector costs the taxpayer hundreds of millions of pounds. Detected cases of fraud and corruption are on the increase. All public sector organisations are likely to be affected in some way by fraudulent or corrupt activity.

The Council's Policy

It is Council policy that all employees and people employed on Council contracts must report suspected or potential irregularities immediately. This could be to your Manager or to any of the people listed on the rear of this leaflet. **The Council has a zero tolerance policy on irregularity. It will not tolerate any fraud or corruption.**

First Steps

We realise you may want to talk over your concerns first, so in the first instance you can talk to any manager, HR, Internal Audit, a Union representative, or Elected Member.

It is very important that you do not investigate the issue yourself; you could damage any evidence that may then prevent us (or the Police) from taking action against the perpetrator. Evidence must be protected – the Police have reported nationally that

they cannot prosecute over half of fraud and corruption cases because of inappropriate action taken **before** the case is referred to them. The action that **you** take when you first suspect fraudulent activity may be crucial.

Acting Upon Your Suspicions – the Do's and Don'ts

If you suspect a fraud or irregularity within the workplace, there are a few simple guidelines that should be followed:

The 3 Do's

1) Do make an immediate note of your concerns

Note all relevant details, such as what was said in telephone or other conversations, the date, time and names of any parties involved. It may help to keep a diary if initially you are not certain, but also follow steps 2 and 3.

2) Do convey your suspicions to someone with appropriate authority and experience, preferably in writing.

The Council would prefer you not to do this anonymously so that if necessary further information can be obtained. However anonymous complaints will be investigated.

If you prefer you may ask a friend or a Trade Union representative to raise the matter on your behalf. Even if you raise the matter yourself, a Union representative, a

friend or colleague may accompany you to any meeting on the issue. *It is the responsibility of the person to whom you report your suspicion to ensure it is investigated.*

3) Do deal with the matter promptly.

Any delay may cause the Council to suffer further loss.

Where possible you will be kept informed of the progress of the investigation and its outcome. Depending upon the findings of the internal investigation, the matter could be referred to the external auditors Grant Thornton or the Police for attention.

The 7 Don'ts

1) Don't do nothing

2) Don't be afraid of raising your concerns.

The Council will treat any matter you raise sensitively and confidentially and will not tolerate harassment or victimisation.

3) Don't approach or accuse any individuals directly.

4) Don't try to investigate the matter yourself.

5) Don't allow irregularities to fester.

6) Don't convey your suspicions to anyone other than those with the proper authority.

Public disclosure of a suspicion could ruin hard won reputations and destroy public confidence. However, you may raise the matter with our external auditors (Grant Thornton) or the Police if your suspicions relate to ALL those officers with whom you would be expected to raise the matter internally, or if we have failed to investigate your concern without explaining why an investigation is not appropriate. Please do consider discussing the issue with the Head of Paid Service before reporting it externally.

7) Don't act maliciously or seek only to cause annoyance.

Always act in good faith

Summary

- Note all relevant details, but do not attempt to investigate the matter further yourself.
- Report all suspicions promptly to the appropriate person.
- If in doubt, report your suspicions anyway.

Need Further Advice ?

If you need further advice you can contact the following people:

Steve Hearse, Statutory Finance Officer on 01237 428967

Staci Dorey, Solicitor on 01237 428763

Sarah Ayres, HR Manager on 01237 428791

Chris Dobbs, Governance Team on 01237 428789

Robert Hutchins, Internal Audit (Devon Audit Partnership) on 01392 383000

Grant Thornton, External Audit on 0117 305 7600

Or you can talk to:

Any Manager
or
Any Trade Union Representative
or
Any Elected Member