

Report for Information

Report to Audit Committee
23 November 2010

Report of Head of Legal and Democratic Services

Subject Whistleblowing Summary 2009/10

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Purpose

To review allegations made in 2009/10 under the council's whistleblowing policy.

Recommendations

Members are asked to note the report.

Financial Consequences

There are no direct financial consequences arising from this report.

Risk Management

In conjunction with the council's enhanced anti-fraud strategies, the whistleblowing policy is intended to mitigate the risk of frauds against the council, by making it clear that all allegations of wrongdoing will be properly investigated.

Strategic Priority and Outcome/Service Priorities

The report helps to meet the strategic priority "One council:

- customer focus – putting customers at the heart of everything we do;
- continuous improvement of our services; and
- cost conscious – efficient and effective service delivery

Contact Officers

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Background Documents

Report

Background

1. Audit Committee approved a revised whistleblowing policy in November 2008.
2. The policy supports the council's strategy to help fight internal fraud and corruption, but was expanded to include other types of "wrongdoing". It is intended to encourage and enable councillors, employees, contractors, suppliers, partners and members of the public to raise concerns with the council, rather than overlooking an issue or reporting the matter elsewhere.
3. This is in line with the Council's Code of Governance, where section 4 includes the following: "*Ensure that effective arrangements for whistleblowing are in place to which members, staff, all those contracting with or appointed by the Council and members of the public have access.*"
4. The policy seeks to let everybody know that the council wants "wrongdoing" to be reported, providing the council with the opportunity to deal with potentially damaging situations, rather than give rise to the possibility of financial loss, regulatory breach or damaged reputation.
5. The policy is available on the council intranet, website and e-councillor, and has been publicised via a managers' briefing, Innercity newsletter and leaflets for managers and staff. It has also been brought to the attention of the City of Norwich Partnership via their newsletter (which is widely circulated) and has been publicised to contractors, suppliers and other key partners.
6. The policy, which is due for review, commits the council to follow up all allegations and report the outcomes in an anonymous format to Audit Committee.

Summary of allegations and outcomes

7. A log has been set up in a protected area of the shared folder system to record allegations received and the outcomes of investigations. This report summarises allegations received in 2009/10.
8. An anonymous version of the log is shown at Annex 1. One case, which involves other organisations in addition to the council, is still ongoing; therefore it is only possible to report on progress to date.
9. The log only includes allegations which have been passed or made to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, the Head of Finance and the Audit Manager. These are the three contacts specifically mentioned in the policy.

Conclusion

10. Allegations are being recorded and investigated in accordance with the policy. No serious internal issues were uncovered as a result of subsequent investigations.

Whistleblowing Register 2009/10

Date of Allegation	Case reference	How Received	Subject	Contact for Investigation	Outcome	Date Case Closed	If whistleblower is an employee, date informed of outcome. (Informing non-staff is at our discretion)
01/08/2009	090801N	Written allegation sent to numerous institutions, including Norwich City Council	Various allegations about a private sector landlord. Those for attention of the council included 1) alleged housing benefit fraud, 2) unpaid council tax and leaseholder charges, 3) overcrowded and unsafe properties.	Audit Manager	1) Allegation re housing benefit investigated but no evidence of fraud. 2) Recovery of all debts is in progress. 3) Control of the properties has passed to other management companies, who are working with the council and other bodies, including the HSE, to address all the issues. Our visits confirm that satisfactory progress is being made.	Ongoing	n/a
10/12/2009	091202A	Letter to Revenues & Benefits Manager and Audit Manager (National Fraud Initiative contacts)	Allegation against individual benefit fraud	Fraud Verification Team Leader	Because the individual was in receipt of a DWP passported benefit the case was referred to them to investigate. Have closed file.	23/12/2009	n/a
09/03/2010	100303A	Letter from Chloe Smith MP to Chief Executive Officer	Although the letter had been treated as an MP enquiry, it contained an anonymous allegation alleging possible inappropriate behaviour by a member of staff. For this reason the Deputy Chief Executive asked the Audit Manager to investigate.	Audit Manager and Regulatory Services Manager	Investigated - no evidence of inappropriate behaviour, and relevant interests declared.	19/04/2010	Letter from CEO to Chloe Smith MP 19/4/10
16/03/2010	100304N	Email to Director of Regeneration and Development	Allegation of inappropriate expenditure by one of the housing units	Director of Regeneration and Development	Investigated by Tenancy Support Manager - no evidence of irregular or inappropriate expenditure	06/05/2010	06/05/2010 - email from Director of Regeneration and Development confirming he would inform correspondent