

Annual Whistleblowing Report 2021-22

To: Audit & Accounts Committee

Meeting Date: 29th September 2022

From: Acting Head of Internal Audit & Risk Management

Electoral division(s): All

Key decision: No

Forward Plan ref: N/A

Outcome: Annual report on the Council's Whistleblowing Policy.

Recommendation: The Committee is asked to note the report.

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1. Background

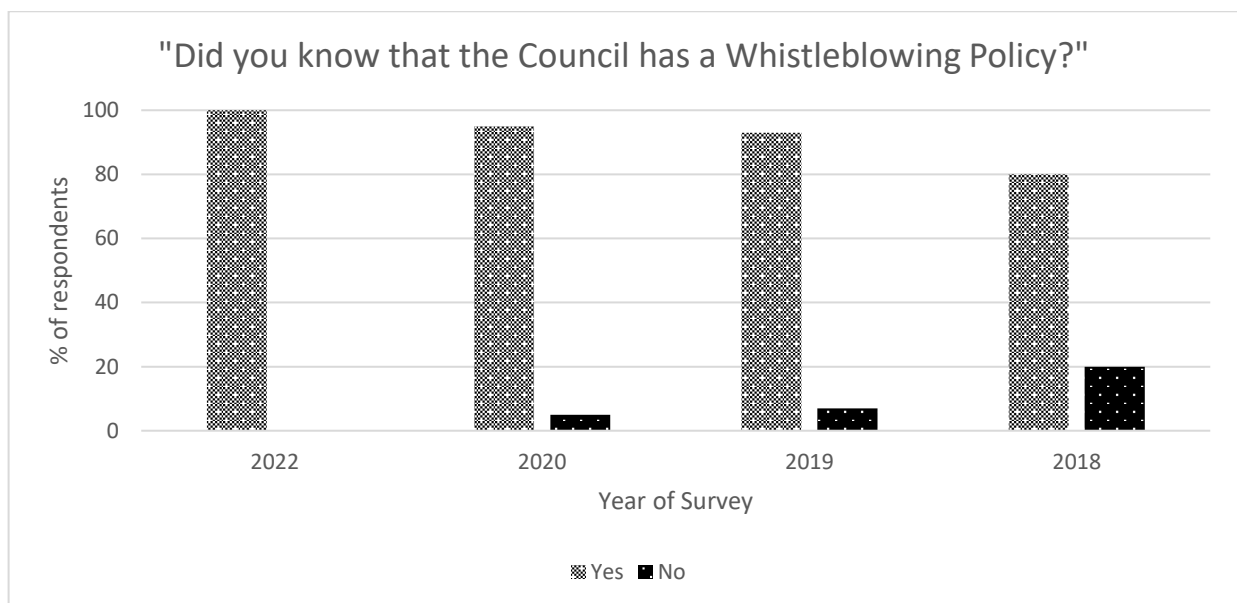
- 1.1 Internal Audit produce an annual report on the Council's Whistleblowing Policy. This seeks to identify any trends or patterns of concern in whistleblowing activity and gives the results of the annual staff survey on whistleblowing.
- 1.2 The Whistleblowing Policy was last updated in 2021 and approved by the Audit & Accounts Committee on the 22nd July 2021. The Chief Executive has committed to personally review the Whistleblowing Policy. This review is ongoing and any changes to the policy will be aligned to the Council's new organisational structure.

2. Whistleblowing 2021/22

2.1 Staff Survey

- 2.1.1 A staff survey was conducted in June 2022 to gauge staff awareness of, and confidence in, the Council's Whistleblowing Policy.
- 2.1.2 The survey was conducted using the same methodology as in previous years, to enable comparison of results over time. One hundred randomly selected members of staff were asked to complete an anonymous online survey, and 40 responses were received. This is broadly in line with 42 responses received in 2020 and 43 in 2019. The survey was not conducted in 2021.
- 2.1.3 All staff who responded were aware of the Council's Whistleblowing Policy. Staff awareness of the policy has steadily improved since the first Annual Report and awareness campaign in 2018:

Table 1: Whistleblowing Policy Awareness

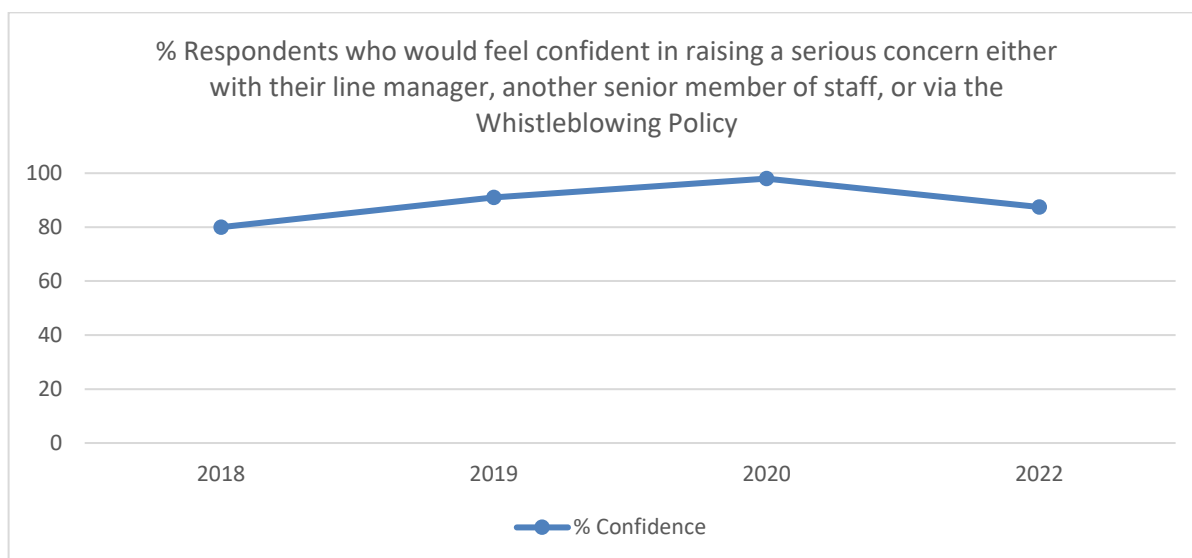


- 2.1.4 Awareness of the detail of the Whistleblowing Policy was more mixed:
 - 47.5% of staff had read the Whistleblowing Policy.

- 42.5% of staff had read corporate communications about the Whistleblowing Policy e.g. in Friday Focus, but had not read the policy itself.
- 10% of staff had not read the Whistleblowing Policy or any comms.

2.1.5 Based on the results of the survey, staff confidence in the whistleblowing process appears to have reduced slightly in 2022. However, with 87.5% of respondents stating they would feel confident in raising a serious concern, confidence is still higher than it was in 2018 when the annual surveys began:

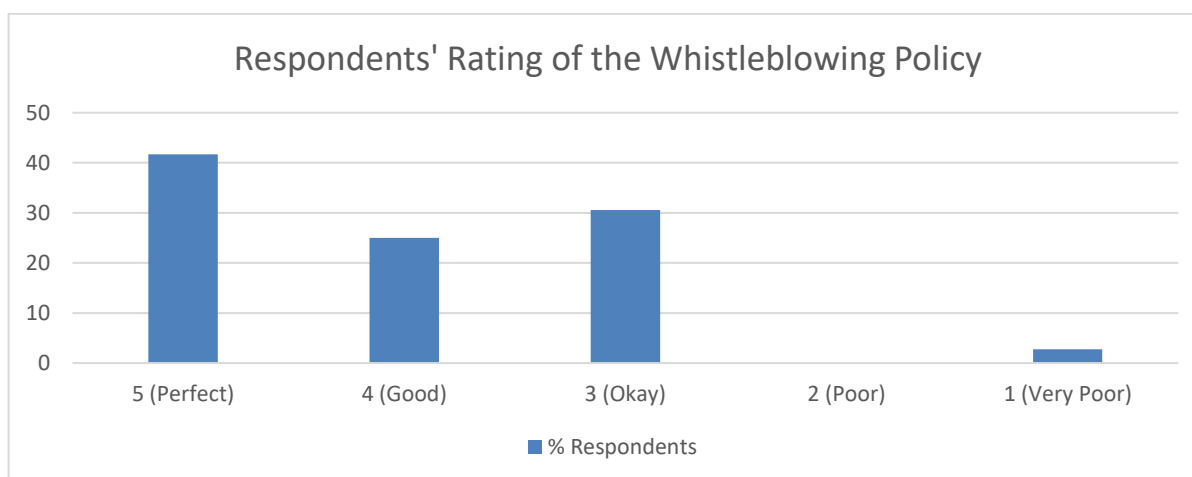
Table 2: Confidence in the Whistleblowing Process:



2.1.6 5% of staff confirmed that they had thought about using the Whistleblowing Policy in the last 12 months. This compares to 0% in 2020, 11% in 2019 and 8% in 2018.

2.1.7 Lastly, staff were asked how they would rate the policy in meeting the needs of someone who had concerns about the Council's services. This was rated on a scale of 1 – 5, with 5 being 'perfect'.

Table 3: Whistleblowing Policy Ratings:



2.1.8 Where staff rated the Whistleblowing Policy as less than 5, they were asked to comment on what the Council could do to change the Policy so that it would score a 5. Details of all the responses received have been passed to the Chief Executive to inform his review and update of the policy.

2.2 Publicity and Awareness

2.2.1 A publicity campaign to raise awareness of the Whistleblowing Policy was run throughout September and October 2021. This included regular features in the 'Friday Focus' staff newsletter and a series of weekly articles on the staff intranet to highlight specific areas of the policy.

2.2.2 The Whistleblowing Policy was also relaunched on the Council's public-facing website with a press release, to raise awareness of the policy and how to report concerns among local residents.

2.2.3 A follow-up publicity campaign has been conducted in September 2022 by Internal Audit. This has included a news article on the CamWeb intranet on 5th September, followed by a series of weekly features in the staff newsletter on:

- What is whistleblowing?
- How to raise a concern
- How the Council will support those who raise a concern
- How the Council will respond to whistleblowing concerns
- The roles and responsibilities of the Council when it comes to disclosures

2.2.4 From the 1st September, a new electronic whistleblowing poster is also being featured on the public information screens at New Shire Hall.

2.3 Overview of Whistleblowing Cases

2.3.1 In total, in the 2021/22 financial year, 20 whistleblowing concerns were raised through the corporate process and referred to Internal Audit. This is broadly in line with the number of cases seen in previous years:

Table 4: Total Number of Whistleblowing Cases by Year

2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
19	24	23	20

2.3.2 The nature of allegations that are referred to the whistleblowing process is very varied. If an issue is raised with Internal Audit via the whistleblowing process, it is recorded in our whistleblowing data even if the issue subsequently is referred in to a different process for resolution (such as the corporate complaints process or Respect At Work process).

2.3.3 The table below sets out the different types of allegations referred to Internal Audit via the whistleblowing process, from 2018/19 to 2021/22.

Table 5: Nature of Whistleblowing Allegations:

	Nature of Allegation	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
Fraud and Theft	Anti-competitive activity		1		
	Bank Mandate fraud			2	
	Blue Badge fraud		6	1	
	Conflict of Interest	2	1		2
	Council Officer fraud	2		3	1
	Direct Payments fraud	2	4	1	
	Overpayment	1			
	Phishing fraud		1		
	Theft	1	1	2	4
	Third Party fraud	1	3	6	1
Schools	School admissions fraud	1	1		
	Schools financial fraud	1			2
	Schools governance allegation	1	1		2
Other	Complaints	1		3	1
	Information Security	1	1	1	
	Internal governance issue	2		3	2
	Staff Conduct / Grievance	2	3	2	2
	Safeguarding	2			2
	Total Case Numbers	20	23	24	19

2.3.4 The nature of the concerns received and any patterns identified is used to inform proactive anti-fraud work by the Internal Audit team. For instance, in 2022/23, work is being undertaken to develop a new Direct Payments Fraud & Misuse Policy and review the control environment for issuing and monitoring Direct Payments.

2.3.5 The table below shows the outcomes from whistleblowing referrals received by the Internal Audit team. Where the outcome recorded is 'no action required', this reflects cases where the initial review of the referral indicates that no investigation or referral of the allegation is needed. For example, this may be because the issue has already been dealt with internally, or is not serious enough to warrant a full investigation.

Table 6: Outcomes from Whistleblowing Referrals:

Nature of Outcome	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
No action required	4	4	8	1
No powers to investigate.	1			1
Referred to relevant process	8	3	6	6
Informal Audit advice & recommendations.		3	2	5
Investigation indicates no serious concerns		6	3	2
Audit report and recommendations	6	5	3	2
Recovery action		1	1	1
Police Referral / Taken to Court	1	1	1	1
Total Case Numbers	20	23	24	19

3. Alignment with corporate priorities

3.1 Environment and Sustainability

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.2 Health and Care

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.3 Places and Communities

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.4 Children and Young People

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.5 Transport

There are no significant implications for this priority.

4. Source documents

4.1 Source documents

4.1.1 Cambridgeshire County Council's Whistleblowing Policy

4.2 Location

4.2.1 The current policy is available on the County Council's external website:

[Whistleblowing Policy - Cambridgeshire County Council](#)