



# Ashfield

DISTRICT COUNCIL

## WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

Director of Legal and Governance (Monitoring Officer)

**APPROVED:**

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# **WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY**

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Employees, Councillors and the public may have concerns about some form of inappropriate conduct within the Council. Usually these concerns are easily resolved. However, when they are about unlawful conduct, financial malpractice or dangers to the public or the environment, it can be difficult to know what to do.
- 1.2 You may be worried about raising such issues or may want to keep the concerns to yourself, perhaps feeling it's none of your business or that it's only a suspicion. You may feel that raising the matter would be disloyal to colleagues, managers or to the organisation. You may fear harassment or victimisation. You may decide to say something but find that you have spoken to the wrong person or raised the issue in the wrong way and are not sure what to do.
- 1.3 Ashfield District Council is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment we encourage employees, Councillors and the public with serious concerns about any aspect of the Council's work to come forward and voice those concerns. It is recognised that certain cases will have to proceed on a confidential basis. This policy document makes it clear that you can do so without fear of victimisation, discrimination or disadvantage. This Whistleblowing Policy is intended to encourage and enable you to raise serious concerns within the Council rather than overlooking a problem or reporting it outside.
- 1.4 This policy applies to all employees, Councillors, partners, volunteers, contractors, suppliers and the public.

## **2. Aims of this Policy**

- 2.1 This policy aims to:
  - encourage you to feel confident in raising concerns at the earliest opportunity
  - provide avenues for you to raise concerns and receive feedback on any action taken
  - allow you to take the matter further if you are dissatisfied with the Council's response
  - reassure you that you will be protected from reprisals or victimisation if you have reasonable belief that you have made any disclosure in good faith

## **3. Scope of this Policy**

- 3.1 In this Policy, "Whistleblowing" means:

*The disclosure of information which relates to some danger, fraud or other illegal or unethical conduct connected with the workplace, be it of the employer or its employees.*

- 3.2 This Policy is intended to enable those who become aware of wrongdoing in the Council affecting some other person or service, to report their concerns at the earliest opportunity.
- 3.3 The Policy is not intended to replace existing procedures:
- If your concern relates to your own treatment as an employee, you should raise it under the existing grievance or bullying / harassment procedures (in other word, personal grievances)
  - If a member of the public has a concern about services provided to them, it should be raised as a complaint to the Council
  - Complaints of misconduct by Councillors are dealt with under a separate procedure (the Monitoring Officer can advise you in relation to this process)
- 3.3 Under this Policy you should report any serious concerns that you have that:
- make you feel uncomfortable in terms of known standards
  - are not in keeping with the Council's Procedure Rules and policies
  - fall below the established standards of practice
  - amount to improper conduct

The concern may be something that relates to:

- conduct which is an offence or a breach of the law
- disclosures relating to miscarriages of justice
- deliberate breach of a Council policy or official code or regulation
- misuse of public funds or other assets
- possible fraud or corruption
- the endangering of health and safety of the public and/or other employees,
- damage to the environment
- unethical conduct
- the deliberate concealment of information which would constitute evidence of any of the above

## 4. Safeguards

### Your Legal Rights

- 4.1 This policy has been written to take account of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 which protects workers making disclosures about certain matters of concern, when those disclosures are made in accordance with the Act's provisions and in good faith.

The Act makes it unlawful for the Council to dismiss anyone or allow them to be victimised on the basis that they have made an appropriate lawful disclosure in accordance with the Act.

Rarely, a case might arise where it is the employee that has participated in the action causing concern. In such a case it is in the employee's interest to come into the open as soon as possible. The Council cannot promise not to act against such an employee, but the fact that they came forward may be taken into account.

### **Harassment or Victimisation**

- 4.2 The Council recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make, not least because of the fear of reprisal from those responsible for the malpractice. The Council will not tolerate harassment or victimisation and will take action to protect you when you raise a concern in good faith. The Council's disciplinary procedures will be used against any employee who is found to be harassing or victimising the person raising the concern or who has disclosed the name of the whistleblower to any person other than those named in this document. **Disclosure or harassment of the whistleblower by a Councillor will be reported under the Members' Code of Conduct.**

### **Confidentiality**

- 4.3 The Council will do its best to protect **your** identity when a concern is raised. During the course of an investigation attempts will be made to find independent corroborating evidence to allow **your** identity to remain confidential. However, it must be recognised that in some circumstances identities will have to be revealed to the person the allegation is made against and **you** may be asked to provide written or verbal evidence in support of the allegation. If the matter is reported to the Police or another external body they may be unable to guarantee to withhold **your** identity.
- 4.4 **Your identity will not be released until the reason for the disclosure has been discussed with you.** The Council will offer advice and guidance on the procedures and arrangements in the event of a person having to give evidence to an external body or in court.

### **Anonymous Allegations**

- 4.5 This policy encourages you to put your name to your allegation. Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful, but they will be considered at the discretion of the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Chief Executive Officer.
- 4.6 In exercising the discretion, the factors to be taken into account would include:
- the seriousness of the issues raised
  - the credibility of the concern
  - the likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources

If you choose to use this method of reporting, the allegation should contain as much information as possible to ensure the allegation is considered as a credible concern that requires further investigation.

## Untrue Allegations

- 4.7 If you make an allegation in good faith, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against you. If, however, you make malicious or vexatious allegations appropriate action that could include disciplinary action may be taken against you. It will be a matter for the Monitoring Officer to form a view of whether an allegation has been made maliciously or vexatiously and to refer her view to the relevant Director if disciplinary action needs to be considered. **If you are a Councillor a complaint may be made under the Members' Code of Conduct.**

## 5. How to raise a concern

### Who do you Report your Concern to?

- 5.1 This will depend on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved or who is thought to be involved in the malpractice. You should normally raise concerns initially with your line manager or Director. If this is not appropriate you should contact:

Position	Contact	E-mail
Chief Executive	(01623) 457250	<a href="mailto:theresa.hodgkinson@ashfield.gov.uk">theresa.hodgkinson@ashfield.gov.uk</a>
Monitoring Officer	(01623) 457009	<a href="mailto:ruth.dennis@ashfield.gov.uk">ruth.dennis@ashfield.gov.uk</a>

If you suspect fraud or corruption you may also approach the officer detailed below. This is consistent with the Council's Financial Regulations and the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy.

Position	Contact	E-mail
Chief Finance Officer	(01623) 457362	<a href="mailto:pete.hudson@ashfield.gov.uk">pete.hudson@ashfield.gov.uk</a>

### How do you Report your Concerns?

- 5.2 Concerns may be raised verbally or in writing. You can raise your concerns in writing by post or e-mail, by telephone or in person. All correspondence sent by post should be addressed to the Monitoring Officer and marked 'Strictly Private and Confidential' and sent to:

**The Monitoring Officer  
Ashfield District Council  
Council Offices  
Urban Road  
Kirkby-in-Ashfield  
Nottingham  
NG17 8DA**

- 5.3 If your concerns are raised in writing, you should try to note all relevant details. Set out the background and history of the concern, giving names, dates and places where possible, and the reason why you are particularly concerned about the situation.

- 5.4 The earlier you express the concern, the easier it is to take action.
- 5.5 Although you are not expected to prove the truth of an allegation, you will need to demonstrate to the person contacted that there are sufficient grounds for your concern.
- 5.6 You may wish to consider raising your concern with a colleague first and you may find it easier to do so if there are two (or more) of you who have shared the same experience or concerns.
- 5.7 You may invite your trade union or professional association to raise a matter on your behalf. It is expected that in the first instance the procedure detailed at 5.1 will be followed.

## **6. What the Council will do**

- 6.1 The action taken by the Council will depend on the nature of the concern. The matters raised may:
- be investigated internally
  - be investigated by Internal Audit (Central Midlands Audit Partnership)
  - be referred to the Police
  - be referred to the Council's external auditor
  - form the subject of an independent inquiry
- 6.2 In order to protect individuals and the Council, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures (for example, discrimination issues) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures. **The overriding principle which the Council will have in mind is the public interest.**
- 6.3 Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation.
- 6.4 Where the concern has been raised includes a contact name and address, then within ten working days of a concern being received, the Council will write to you:
- acknowledging that the concern has been received
  - indicating how it proposes to deal with the matter
  - giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response
  - telling you whether any initial enquiries have been made
  - telling you if further investigations will take place, and if not, why not
- 6.5 The amount of contact between the officers considering the issues and you will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, further information will be sought from you.

- 6.6 When any meeting is arranged, you have the right, if you so wish, to be accompanied by a Trade Union or professional association representative or a workplace colleague who is not involved in the area of work to which the concern relates. If you wish, the meeting may take place away from the Council Offices.
- 6.7 The Council will take steps to minimise any difficulties which you may experience as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if you are required to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, the Council will advise you about the procedure.
- 6.8 The person investigating the concerns will produce a written report that:
- outlines the concerns/allegations
  - details the investigation procedure
  - gives the outcomes of the investigation
  - details recommendations where appropriate
- 6.9 The Council accepts that you need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. Thus, subject to legal constraints, you will receive information about the outcomes of any investigations.

## **7. How the matter can be taken further**

- 7.1 This policy is intended to provide you with an avenue to raise concerns within the Council. The Council hopes you will be satisfied. If you are not, and if you feel it is right to take the matter outside the Council, the following are possible contact points:
- A prescribed person - See Gov.uk Guidance – Whistleblowing: List of prescribed people and bodies  
Website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/blowing-the-whistle-list-of-prescribed-people-and-bodies--2>
  - The Comptroller and Auditor General  
The Comptroller and Auditor General  
National Audit Office  
157-197 Buckingham Palace Road  
London  
SW1W 9SP  
Tel: 020 7798 7999  
Website: [www.nao.org.uk/contact-us/whistleblowing-disclosures/](http://www.nao.org.uk/contact-us/whistleblowing-disclosures/)
  - The independent charity Protect on Work Helpline: (020) 3117 2520  
E-mail: [protect-advice.org.uk/contact-protect-advice-line/](mailto:protect-advice.org.uk/contact-protect-advice-line/)  
Website: [www.protect-advice.org.uk](http://www.protect-advice.org.uk)
  - ACAS  
Helpline number: 0300 123 1100 Monday-Friday: 8am-8pm and Saturday 9am-1pm  
Website: <https://www.acas.org.uk/archive/whistleblowing>

If you raise concerns outside the Council you should ensure that it is to one of these contacts. A public disclosure to anyone else could take you outside the protection

of the Public Disclosure Act and of this Policy. **When raising a concern externally remember to make it clear that you are raising the issue as a whistleblower; this gives you additional statutory rights.**

You should not disclose information that is confidential to the Council or to anyone else, except to those included in the list of contacts.

## **8. The Responsible Officer**

- 8.1 The Monitoring Officer has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this policy. This officer maintains a record of concerns raised and the outcomes (but in a form which does not endanger your confidentiality) and will report these to the Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee and the Audit Committee once a year. The Whistleblowing Policy will also be reviewed **annually**.

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