

Summary:

This policy is for all Council staff, including employees, temporary workers, agency staff and people working for contractors and relates to how to raise genuine concerns of illegal, unethical or immoral conduct.

Note: This policy should be read in conjunction with The Anti-Fraud Bribery and Corruption Policy, Raising a Grievance Informally guidance and Employees Code of Conduct.

ID	Whistle Blowing Policy
Last Review Date	January 2023
Next Review Date	January 2024
Approval	Governance and Audit and Standards Committee
Policy Owner	Chief Internal Auditor
Policy Author	Deputy Chief Internal Auditor
Advice & Guidance	Audit & Counter Fraud or Monitoring Officer
Related Documents	Freedom of Information Act 2000 http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/contents Data Protection Act 1998 http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/29/contents
Applicability	Guidance for all staff, including employees, temporary workers, agency staff and people working for contractors.

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Council is committed to achieving the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability in all of its practices. This policy is here to help you as an employee, to raise a concern you may have in the right way without fear.
- 1.2 We all have, at one time concerns about what is happening at work. Usually these concerns are easily resolved. However, when the concern is about illegal, unethical or immoral conduct i.e. malpractice; it can be difficult to know what to do. You may feel worried about raising an issue and decide to keep the concern to yourself, perhaps feeling that it is none of your business, only a suspicion or possibly a misunderstanding or interpretation. You may feel that raising the matter may be disloyal to colleagues, managers or the Council itself. Or perhaps you have tried to raise the matter, but found you have spoken to the wrong person or raised the issue in the wrong way and are not sure what to do next.
- 1.3 The Council would prefer you raise any concern about such malpractice when it is just a concern, rather than wait for proof. This policy aims to help you raise any concern about malpractice in the right way. It explains the routes open to all Council staff, including employees, temporary workers, agency staff and people working for contractors. This policy does not replace the Council's complaints procedure, which is open to all members of the public.

2 Scope of this policy

- 2.1 This whistleblowing policy is primarily for a serious concern, which affects the interests of others, such as service users, the public, colleagues or the council itself. Concerns may include but are not excluded to:
 - Breach of the law or committing an offence
 - Unauthorised or misappropriation of public funds
 - Suspected fraudulent activities
 - Approaches of bribery
 - Physical or sexual abuse of clients
 - Safeguarding of clients as a result of poor practice
- 2.2 If you want to bring a complaint or grievance that is about your employment or the way you have been treated, please use the Grievance Procedure.

If in doubt – please raise it!

3 Our assurances to you

Your safety

- 3.1 We recognise it may be difficult to raise a concern.
- 3.2 If you raise a genuine concern under this policy you will not be at risk of losing your job or suffering any reprisal as a result. Provided that you raise the matter honestly, it does not matter if you are mistaken. Of course we do not extend this assurance to someone who maliciously raises a concern they know is untrue. Any such conduct may be liable to disciplinary action or other appropriate action.
- 3.3 If disciplinary action or redundancy procedures have already been started, raising a concern will not, in itself, halt them.

Your confidence

- 3.4 We will not tolerate the harassment or victimisation of anyone raising a genuine concern. However we recognise that there may be some circumstances when you would prefer to speak to someone in confidence under this policy. If this is the case please say so at the outset. If you ask not to disclose your identity, we will not do so without your consent unless required by law. You should understand that there may be circumstances when we are unable to resolve a concern without revealing your identity (for instance where your personal evidence is essential) and in such cases we will discuss with you whether and how best we can proceed.

Anonymity

- 3.5 Please remember that if you do not tell us who you are it may be more difficult for us to look into the matter, as further clarification may be needed in relation to the concerns raised. In addition we will not be able to protect your position and or be able to provide you with the same support and assurances if you report a concern anonymously.

4 How to raise a concern

- 4.1 Please remember that you do not need to have firm evidence of malpractice before raising a concern. However, we do ask that you explain as fully as you can the information or circumstances that gave rise to your concern. Remember the earlier you raise a concern the easier it is to resolve it. If you wish, you may be accompanied by a union or professional association representative or a friend.

Option One

- 4.2 We hope that you will feel able to raise your concern openly with your manager. This may be done orally, or if you prefer, in writing.

Option Two

- 4.3 If you feel unable to raise the matter with your manager for whatever reason, or if you think the concern has not been properly addressed, please raise it with a senior manager in your area or contact:

Whistleblowing line on 023 9284 1373 email:
Whistleblowing@portsmouthcc.gov.uk

Or via post (marked Private & Confidential) to:

Audit & Counter Fraud
Portsmouth City Council
Civic Offices
Guildhall Square
Portsmouth
PO1 2AR

Or contact one of the following officers:

Paul Somerset, Deputy Chief Internal Auditor (023 9283 4673) email:
Paul.Somerset@portsmouthcc.gov.uk

Elizabeth Goodwin, Chief Internal Auditor (023 9283 4682) email:
Elizabeth.Goodwin@portsmouthcc.gov.uk

Peter Baulf, Monitoring Officer & City Solicitor (023 9283 4041) email:
Peter.Baulf@portsmouthcc.gov.uk

These people have been given special responsibility and training in dealing with whistle blowing concerns.

5 How we will handle the matter

- 5.1 Once you have raised your concern we will acknowledge (within 3 working days) that it has been received and confirm our understanding of the issues raised, to ensure that your concern is fully understood.
- 5.2 Initial enquiries will then be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. All investigations undertaken within the Authority are directed by the 'Investigations Steering Panel' whose panel members include, Monitoring Officer, Deputy section 151 Officer and Audit & Counter Fraud. If deemed appropriate, the concern raised may be:
- Investigated by Audit & Counter Fraud or Management.
 - Referred to the Police
 - Referred to the External Auditor
 - The subject of an independent inquiry
 - A combination of the above

- 5.3 While we cannot guarantee that we will respond to all matters in the way that you might wish, we will handle the matter fairly and properly. We will not be able to disclose specific details of how this will be achieved. We will however give you limited feedback on the outcome of any investigation. Please note, that we will not be able to tell you about disciplinary or legal action, when it infringes a duty of confidence we owe to third parties.
- 5.4 Portsmouth City Council in issuing this policy is mindful of its responsibility under the General Data Protection Regulations, Data Protection and Freedom of Information Acts. These pieces of legislation impose an obligation on PCC to allow access to information held in relation to such investigations (subject to legal exemptions) whilst protecting the rights of individuals whom the data is about.
- 5.5 If you have any personal interest in the matter, we do ask that you tell us at the outset. If we think your concern falls more properly within the Grievance Procedure, we will tell you.

6 Independent advice

If you are unsure whether to use this policy or you want independent advice at any stage, free advice is available from:

- Your Trade Union, if applicable
- Protect, either by telephone on 020 3117 2510 or by email at whistle@protect-advice.org.uk

7 External contacts

- 7.1 While we hope this policy gives you the reassurance you need to raise a concern internally, we recognise that there may be circumstances where you can properly report matters to outside bodies, such as the External Audit or other appropriate regulator, or in very serious situations, to the police.
- 7.2 Protect, or if applicable, your union will be able to advise you on such an option and on the circumstances in which you may be able to contact an outside body safely.

8 Administration

- 8.1 If you have any questions about the whistleblowing policy and how it applies, you can contact Audit & Counter Fraud or the City Solicitor & Monitoring Officer who will be pleased to answer your questions.
- 8.2 The Chief Internal Auditor has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this policy and will report to the Governance and Audit and Standards annually on the application of this policy. The Deputy Chief Internal

Auditor maintains a record of concerns raised and the outcomes (but in a form which does not endanger staff confidentiality).

8.3 This policy will be reviewed annually by the Governance and Audit and Standards Committee.

See also: -

- The Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy
- The Complaints Policy
- The local Code of Conduct
- Employees Code of Conduct and Formal Action Policy
- The Council's Grievance Procedure and Raising a Grievance Informally