SHAFTESBURY TOWN COUNCIL

Delivering Excellence across the Shaftesbury Community

Whistleblowing Policy

Date of Adoption: 2017 07 18
Reviewed: 17th December 2024
Review Due: December 2027

Managing People Policies

Background

In line with best practices, the Council has established a Confidential Reporting (Whistleblowing) Policy to encourage employees to report any concerns of malpractice internally, without fear of retaliation. Recognising that improper conduct can damage the Council's reputation, this policy empowers employees to voice their concerns—whether involving other employees, contractors, members of the public, or Council Members—assuring that reports will be addressed swiftly and respectfully.

Employees should familiarise themselves with standards outlined in the Employee Handbook, and managers are encouraged to regularly review these standards with their teams. New employees will receive the Handbook as part of their induction.

Typically, employees should bring concerns to the Town Clerk. However, if this does not feel appropriate, employees may directly contact Internal Audit by phone or in writing, marked “Private & Confidential.”

Confidentiality

We treat all concerns with strict confidentiality and will make every effort to protect the identity of any employee who reports an issue. However, should a thorough investigation be required, employees may need to participate as witnesses at a later stage.

Anonymous Allegations

To ensure employee protection under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, it is preferred that concerns are reported with the employee's name attached. While anonymous reports are less actionable, they will still be assessed based on factors such as:

- Seriousness of the issue raised
- Credibility of the concern
- Feasibility of substantiating the allegation with factual evidence

Managers will be trained to respond supportively to employee concerns and will be expected to act on any raised issues. Discouraging an employee from reporting fraud or abuse will be treated as serious misconduct. Likewise, maliciously raising false concerns is also deemed a serious offense and may be subject to disciplinary action under the Staff Code of Conduct Policy.

Employees who report matters will be updated on investigation progress and outcomes while maintaining the confidentiality of involved parties and the integrity of ongoing investigations.

1. Introduction

1.1 Employees are often the first to notice potential issues within the Council but may feel hesitant to report these concerns due to fears of being disloyal or facing victimisation.

1.2 The Council is committed to openness, probity, and accountability. This policy encourages employees and affiliated parties with legitimate concerns to report these in confidence, without fear of retaliation, supporting a productive and transparent working environment.

1.3 This policy applies to all employees and contractors working on Council premises, as well as suppliers providing services under a Council contract.

1.4 This procedure supplements the Council's complaints process and other reporting procedures.

2. Untrue allegations

If an employee raises a concern in good faith but it is unverified upon investigation, no action will be taken against them. However, any allegations made maliciously or for personal gain may lead to disciplinary action.

3. How to raise a concern

Employees should first try to raise concerns with a trusted contact not directly involved in the issue, such as their immediate manager or supervisor. If the matter is particularly sensitive or involves management, the Town Clerk or Independent Internal Auditor can be contacted.

Concerns can be shared verbally or in writing. Written reports are encouraged to include:

- Background and history of the concern (with relevant dates)
- Reason for concern

The sooner a concern is raised, the easier it will be to address. Employees are not required to prove the concern beyond doubt, but reasonable grounds must be demonstrated.

4. Council response

Upon receiving a concern, the Council will acknowledge it, typically within five working days, and provide an update on any further steps.

Where appropriate, concerns may result in:

- Management or internal audit investigation
- Referral to police or external auditors
- An independent inquiry

5. The Responsible Officer

The Town Clerk holds overall responsibility for this policy's administration, maintaining a record of raised concerns and reporting outcomes confidentially to the Council. Should the Town Clerk be involved in a matter, the Independent Internal Auditor will manage record-keeping.

6. Taking the matter further

This policy is designed to provide a secure internal avenue for raising concerns. However, if an employee remains dissatisfied and feels the need to take the matter outside the Council, possible contacts include:

- A local Council Member (if within the Council area)
- External Auditor
- Professional or regulatory organisations
- Monitoring Officer
- Public Concern at Work (PCAW)
- Solicitor
- Police

Employees considering external action should avoid disclosing unrelated confidential Council information and are advised to consult the Town Clerk for confidential advice