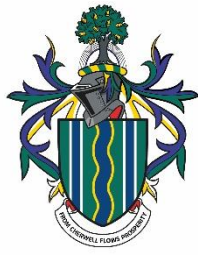


APPENDIX 1



Whistleblowing Policy

DOCUMENT CONTROL

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|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Organisation(s) | Cherwell District Council (CDC) |
| Policy title | Whistleblowing Policy |
| Owner | Human Resources |
| Version | 1.0 |
| Date of implementation | |

DOCUMENT APPROVALS

This document requires the following committee approvals:

| Committee | Date of meeting pending approval |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Accounts Audit and Risk Committee | 29 May 2024 |

DOCUMENT DISTRIBUTION

This document will be distributed via the intranet and staff communications to all employees of Cherwell District

DATE FOR REVIEW

No later than 1st November 2026 but sooner if impacted by legislative changes.

REVISION HISTORY

| Version | Revision date | Summary of revision |
|----------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
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Whistleblowing Policy

All organisations face the risk of things going wrong from time to time, or of unknowingly harbouring illegal or unethical conduct. A culture of openness and accountability is essential in order to prevent such situations occurring and to address them when they do occur.

The purpose of this policy is to encourage staff to report suspected wrongdoing as soon as possible, in the knowledge that their concerns will be taken seriously and investigated as appropriate, and that their confidentiality will be respected. To provide staff with guidance as to how to raise those concerns and to reassure staff that they should be able to raise genuine concerns without fear of reprisals, even if they turn out to be mistaken.

The whistleblowing policy should only be used when other policies are inappropriate. A grievance should be reported using the Grievance policy only.

This policy has been implemented following consultation with the Corporate Leadership Team and agreement with the Accounts Audit and Risk Committee.

This policy does not form part of any contract of employment or other contract to provide services, and we may amend it at any time.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Employees are often the first to realise that there may be something seriously wrong within a local authority. However, they may not express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues or to the council. They may also fear harassment or victimisation. In these circumstances employees may feel that it is easier to ignore the concern, rather than report what may just be a suspicion of malpractice.
- 1.2 Cherwell District Council (CDC) is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment CDC encourages employees and others with serious concerns about any aspect of either Council's work to come forward and voice those concerns.
- 1.3 Whistleblowing is the term used when someone who works in or for an organisation discloses information which relates to a suspected wrongdoing or dangers at work. This may be a concern about a possible fraud, crime, danger or other serious risk that could threaten customers, colleagues, the public or the organisation's own reputation. For example, instances of theft from the Council, accepting or offering a bribe, and failure by colleagues to adhere to Health & Safety directives could all be the subject of a whistleblowing disclosure.
- 1.4 The whistleblowing policies and procedures in local authorities are assessed regularly as part of the external audit and review. The Council is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability, and so has developed and endorsed this policy. In line with that commitment the Council expects and encourages employees, and others that it deals with, who have serious concerns about any aspect of the Council's work to come forward and voice those concerns without fear of detriment.

2. Who can use this policy?

- 2.1 This policy is for Council officers whether they be full or part-time, secondees, consultants, agency workers, casual workers or volunteers or self-employed contractors.

3. What does the is policy apply to?

- 3.1 This policy applies to the disclosure of suspected wrongdoing or dangers at work.
- 3.2 Examples would include a criminal offence, fraud or corruption, damage to the environment, health and safety and safeguarding concerns, theft or misuse of public money, breach of legal obligation, failure to follow the council's finance contract or other rules or a deliberate attempt to conceal any of these things.
- 3.3 A whistleblower is a person who raises a genuine concern relating to any of the above. If you have any genuine concerns related to suspected wrongdoing or danger affecting any of our activities (a whistleblowing concern) you should report it under this policy.

4. Purpose of whistleblowing policy

4.1 This policy:

- Encourages officers to blow the whistle within the Council rather than say nothing or take their concerns elsewhere
- Protects whistleblowers from reprisals as long as they have acted honestly and in the public interest
- Provides a procedure for whistleblowing
- Ensures whistleblowers get a response
- Gives advice on what to do if the response is not good enough

5. Protecting the identity of whistleblowers

5.1 We hope that staff will feel able to voice whistleblowing concerns openly under this policy. However, if you want to raise your concern confidentially, we will make every effort to keep your identity secret. If it is necessary for anyone investigating your concern to know your identity, we will discuss this with you.

6. How will the Council protect whistleblowers?

6.1 A whistleblower with genuine and legitimate concerns that are made in good faith will be protected from any victimization or detrimental treatment for having raised those concerns. Reprisals will be treated seriously as a disciplinary offence and dealt with through the disciplinary policy and procedure.

7. Anonymous allegations

7.1 We do not encourage staff to make disclosures anonymously, although we will make every effort to investigate anonymous disclosures. You should be aware that proper investigation may be more difficult or impossible if we cannot obtain further information from you.

8. Untrue allegations

8.1 If a whistleblower has made false allegations that are made without a reasonable belief as to their truth or not made in the public interest, these are likely to be treated as a disciplinary offence and dealt with through the disciplinary policy and procedure.

9. Role of trade unions and professional associations

9.1 Workers can raise concerns themselves or ask their trade union or professional association to act on their behalf. Whistleblowers can bring a trade union or professional association representative or a friend with them to any meeting under this policy.

10. How do workers blow the whistle?

- 10.1 Putting concerns in writing, giving as much detail and including relevant dates.
- 10.3 If a whistleblower does not feel they can put their concerns in writing, they can be interviewed instead.

11.0 Who should whistleblowers go to with their allegations?

- 11.1 Whistleblowers should normally go to their line manager, Assistant Director or the Monitoring Officer.
- 11.2 If you are concerned about possible reprisals if your identity is revealed, or you suspect fraud or corruption, you can report it to Veritau, our internal audit and counter fraud provider, on their hotline, 0800 9179 247. Veritau also have a whistleblowing email address, whistleblowing@veritau.co.uk through which a report can be made.

12.0 How will the Council respond to whistleblowing?

- 12.1 Upon receipt of an allegation under this policy the person receiving the allegation must immediately notify the Monitoring Officer.

13. Investigation

- 13.1 The Monitoring Officer will arrange a meeting with the employee as soon as possible to discuss their concern. A written summary of the whistleblower's concern will be written down and the whistleblower will be provided with a copy of the note after the meeting and the Council will write to the whistleblower within 10 working days of receipt of their disclosure. The letter should:
- acknowledge that the whistleblower has used the whistleblowing policy
 - say how their concern will be dealt with and how long they think this will take
 - tell them whether any initial enquiries have been made
 - say what further action will be taken (or say why no further action will be taken)
 - Tell them they have the right to bring someone with them to any meetings they have to attend about the allegation.

14. Interview

- 14.1 The Council will carry out an initial assessment to determine the scope of any investigation and the whistleblower may be required to attend additional meetings in order to provide further information.
- 14.2 In some cases, the Council may appoint an investigator to look into the concerns raised. The investigator may make recommendations for change to enable the Council to minimise the risk of any future wrongdoing.
- 14.3 The need for confidentiality may prevent the Council from giving the whistleblower the specific details of the investigation or outcome.

15. External disclosure

- 15.1 In some circumstances it may be appropriate for the whistleblower to report their concerns to an external body such as a regulator. It will very rarely if ever be appropriate to alert the media. Staff are strongly encouraged to seek advice before reporting a concern to anyone external. If a worker does raise their concerns outside the Council, they must do it without passing on confidential information. The Monitoring Officer can give advice on this.

16. Response to whistleblowers at the end of the investigation

- 16.1 Wherever possible and if the law allows, the Council will tell the whistleblower the outcome of any Investigation within 10 working days of it ending.

17. Support

- 17.1 Whistleblowers must not suffer any detrimental treatment as a result of raising a concern. Detrimental treatment includes dismissal, disciplinary action, threats or other unfavourable treatment connected with raising a concern. If the whistleblower believes that they have suffered any such treatment, they should inform the Monitoring Officer. Disciplinary action will be taken against those that threaten or retaliate against whistleblowers in any way.
- 17.2.1 Whistleblowers are encouraged to obtain support and advice that may include their trade union representative or HR team contact, a designated representative for bullying and harassment or the charity Protect, the whistleblowing charity, which provides a confidential independent helpline for whistleblowers. Contact details are shown below.

18. Taking concerns further

Protect

(Independent whistleblowing charity)

Helpline: (020) 3117 2520

Website: www.protect-advice.org.uk

19. Monitoring and Reporting

- 19.1 The Monitoring officer (or their nominated deputy) will report to each meeting of the Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee on the number (if any) of whistleblowing complaints made and any outcomes, in an appropriately anonymized way.

20. Responsibility for this Policy

- 20.1 The Monitoring Officer has overall responsibility for this policy and how it is used and how the policy is working.