

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

ANTI FRAUD THEFT AND CORRUPTION STRATEGY

WHISTLEBLOWERS' CHARTER

1. Introduction

The council is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with that commitment, employees, members of the public and other interested parties are encouraged to voice those concerns. The charter encourages and enables serious concerns to be raised within the council on a confidential basis and without fear of reprisals.

2. Aims

- To provide a facility to raise concerns and receive feedback on action taken
- To demonstrate the council's commitment to investigate concerns
- To provide protection from reprisals and victimisation for whistleblowing

Concerns may be about something that: -

- Is unlawful
- Is against council's Standing Orders or policies
- Falls below established standards or practices
- Results in waste or loss to the council
- Amounts to improper conduct

Examples of malpractice may include concerns about possible corruption, financial irregularities and dangerous procedures.

3. Safeguards

The Whistleblowers' Charter contains a number of safeguards:

- Harassment or victimisation

The council will not tolerate harassment or victimisation and will take action to protect whistleblowers who raise concerns in good faith.

- Confidentiality

The council will do its best to protect your identity if you raise a concern and do not want your name disclosed. However, you must appreciate

that the investigation process may reveal the source of the information and a statement may be required as part of the evidence.

- **Anonymous Allegations**

Allegations / concerns can be made anonymously, however it should be noted that such cases can be more difficult to investigate. The likelihood of action will depend on: -

- The seriousness of issues raised
- Credibility of the concern
- Likelihood of confirming the allegation from attributable sources.

- **Untrue Allegations**

No action will be taken against whistleblowers if allegations are made in good faith. However, malicious or unfounded allegations may result in disciplinary action taken against the whistleblower.

4. Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998

The Act gives statutory protection, with defined parameters, to employees who make disclosures, which they believe to be happening within the authority employing them.

The Act has rules for making a protected disclosure: -

- You must disclose the information in good faith
- You must believe it to be substantially true
- You must not act maliciously or make false allegations
- You must not seek personal gain

By regulations issued under the Act, the Audit Commission has taken on new responsibilities as a "prescribed person" that involves receiving disclosures internally.

The Audit Commission has the responsibility to ensure that disclosures are properly investigated and will report its findings to the person making disclosures.

5. Disclosure Procedures

- In the first instance, employees should bring the matter to their line manager
- If that person is involved, they should approach the next level of management
- Access to management in these circumstances should be confidential

- Concerns can be raised in writing or alternatively the Whistleblowers' Hotline can be used. Trained Internal Audit staff manage the telephone line during office hours and an answer phone facility covers other periods. The Hotline telephone number is 01724 296666. Information is considered and passed to the appropriate section for further investigation, if necessary. Feedback is provided to Internal Audit, who monitor the progress of each call.
- All referrals received by Internal Audit will be acted upon within two working days. A full investigation may take more time to conclude. Naturally, the details and information that can be provided will assist the investigation process. Some concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of other specific procedures (for example child protection, or personnel policy) will be referred to appropriate sections.
- The council has appropriate procedures to receive and to investigate all concerns / allegations which should be followed. However, if you feel unable to talk to anyone within the council under the terms of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, you may contact the Audit Commission on a special telephone line on 020 7630 1019.
- If you are still not satisfied, you may wish to contact Public Concern at Work, by telephoning 020 7404 6609 or e-mail whistle@pcaw.co.uk . Public Concern at Work is an independent charity providing free advice for persons who wish to express concern about fraud and other serious malpractice in the workplace.

6. Confidentiality

People who provide information to the Hotline are asked to appreciate that, although the investigation will be carried out in the manner described above, it will not be possible for feedback on the progress of any investigation to be provided to the Whistleblower. However, if a contact name or telephone number is provided, this may be used in order to obtain further information or clarification during the course of the investigation.

Contact Tel: 01724 296666

Email: hotline@northlincs.gov.uk