

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leader and Cabinet 14 December 2006
AUTHORS: Chief Executive/ Assistant Solicitor/HR Manager/Finance Project Officer

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

Purpose

1. The purposes of this report are to request Cabinet to approve:
 - (a) the adoption of a revised Whistleblowing Policy for the Council; and
 - (b) the appointment of appropriate consultants to provide briefing sessions for existing staff and Members on the revised Policy.

Executive Summary

2. The Council's Whistleblowing Policy needed to be updated. A working group of nominees from Standards Committee and officers reviewed the policy. Standards Committee recommended to Cabinet a revised Policy for adoption. Cabinet agreed to adopt the revised Policy, subject to two points, which were referred back to Standards Committee. Standards Committee approved amendments to the Policy and have recommended to Cabinet that the amended Policy be adopted

Background

3. Standards Committee considered a proposed revised Whistleblowing Policy at its meeting on 9 August 2006 and decided to recommend to Cabinet that the revised Policy be adopted.
4. Cabinet considered the revised Whistleblowing Policy at its meeting on 14 September 2006 and agreed to adopt the revised Policy, subject to:
 - (a) the Internal Audit Manager's views being sought about becoming the first point of contact, rather than the Monitoring Officer;
 - (b) the Resources, Staffing, Information and Customer Services Portfolio Holder and Chief Executive determining the final wording of paragraph 3.1 of the Policy.
5. Cabinet also agreed to subscribe to the Public Concern at Work "starter package" (approximately £310 per annum).

Considerations

6. The Internal Audit Manager has agreed to become the first point of contact and the wording of the Policy has been amended where appropriate to reflect this.
7. Paragraph 3.1 of the Policy covers safeguards over harassment or victimisation. Some wording has been added to the end of the final sentence of the paragraph, so that it now includes Members, as follows (additional wording shown in ***bold italics***):

“The Council will not tolerate any harassment or victimisation of a whistleblower (including informal pressures) and will treat this as a serious disciplinary offence, which will be dealt with under the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure (*staff*) or via *the procedures under the Members’ Code of Conduct, as appropriate.*”

8. Standards Committee approved these amendments to the Policy at its meeting on 8 November 2006.
9. The revised Policy will need to be re-launched to existing staff and Members. This will be done through:
 - (a) inclusion in the next round of staff briefings to be held in early 2007 by the Chief Executive and Executive Director;
 - (b) promotion on In-Site, the Council’s intranet; and
 - (c) a series of posters and handouts.

Options

10. Members could decide to approve the amendments to the Policy, or make other changes to the Policy.

Implications

11. Financial	There are no direct financial implications resulting from this report.
Legal	Any matters brought to the Council’s attention under this Policy would be dealt with by the procedures outlined in it.
Staffing	The Policy reflects responsibilities attributable to particular posts and offices. Staff raising concerns under this Policy will be aware of the safeguards available to them.
Risk Management	The Policy is part of the Council’s arrangements for ensuring that proper standards of financial conduct are maintained, and that fraud and corruption are prevented and detected.
Equal Opportunities	The Policy is available for any member of staff, or contractors or Members to access.

Consultations

12. The previous version of the revised Policy was provided to Unison and GMB for their consideration. No comments have been received.

Effect on Annual Priorities and Corporate Objectives

13. Affordable Homes	South Cambridgeshire District Council is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, honesty and accountability. The Whistleblowing Policy encourages Council employees, contractors and Members with concerns about any aspect of the Council’s work, to report such matters without fear of intimidation or reprisal.
Customer Service	
Northstowe and other growth areas	
Quality, Accessible Services	
Village Life	
Sustainability	
Partnership	

Conclusions/Summary

14. The Internal Audit Manager has agreed to become the first point of contact with regard to the Policy. Safeguards over harassment and victimisation now include Members. The Policy has been amended accordingly.

Recommendation

15. Cabinet is recommended to approve the adoption of the revised Whistleblowing Policy.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: The Council's current Whistleblowing Policy
Whistleblowing policies from a range of other councils
"Speaking out without fear", Unison's guide to whistleblowing
"Whistleblowing Best Practice", Guidance from Public Concern at Work

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