

Whistleblowing Policy

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Version control

This document is subject to regular review due to legislative and policy changes. The latest versions of all our publications can be found on our website. Before contacting us about the content of this document, we recommend that you refer to the most recent version on the website and any relevant guidance.

Version	Date approved	Approved by	Notes / changes
v1.0	12/04/2016	Full council	New Policy
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TIMESCALES

Within 3 working days. The person who you report your concerns under this policy must report them to the Monitoring Officer.

Within 10 working days of your concern being raised. You will receive a letter (or information in your preferred format)

One page whistleblowing overview

Whistleblowing is for:

- All employees, including contractors, voluntary workers, consultants and those providing services via contract or other agreements.
- Genuine concerns about malpractice or impropriety that you believe to be in the public interest, including but is not limited to fraud, theft, mismanagement, bribery and health and safety failures.

Whistleblowing is not for:

- Raising employment concerns
- Complaints related to bullying, harassment and victimisation issues
- Questioning financial and/or business decisions made by Denbighshire County Council
- Raising issues that have already been addressed under the disciplinary, grievance or other procedures. An individual can however raise a concern about failure to follow these procedures

Who can I contact to blow the whistle?

- Your Line Manager
- A Senior Manager
- Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer, Head of Finance and Audit
- Any person listed in the internal contacts list.

Details on how to raise a concern can be found in How to raise a concern.

Can I keep my identity a secret?

You are encouraged to give your name when making a disclosure. You can make an anonymous disclosure but these will be less credible. Any concern raised will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal the whistleblowers identity.

What will happen to me if I blow the whistle?

The council has a duty to protect whistleblowers and to ensure that any concerns can be raised without recrimination or reprisal.

I don't feel that I am able to blow the whistle – how can I get help?

- You can contact Public Concern at Work (PCaW) for free confidential advice about the best way to raise a concern. You can contact PCaW via their website www.pcaw.co.uk
- Speak to your Trade Union representative

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

HEAD OF SERVICE AND MONITORING OFFICER

- Responsible for overall maintenance and operation of this policy
- Ensuring the policy is followed and implemented.
- Provide advice and guidance on how matters of concern may be pursued.
- Liaise with the Head of Finance and Audit to consider the most appropriate method of investigating the matter of concern.
- Maintain record of concerns and outcomes ensuring that concerns have been investigated in accordance with this policy.
- To report to Corporate Governance Committee on the operation of this policy annually.

INTERNAL AUDIT

- Overall responsibility (along with the Monitoring Officer) for the monitoring of the procedures and advising on the application of this policy, maintaining a register, monitoring all whistleblowing concerns and reporting details to relevant stakeholders.

MANAGERS

- Ensure that any concerns are taken seriously and reported to the Monitoring Officer with immediate effect.
- Ensure that all employees are aware of this policy
- Support employees/workers who raise a concern under this policy to ensure that they do not suffer detriment as a result of their action.

HR

- Advise on the application of this policy and the support arrangements for employees.

EMPLOYEES AND OTHER WORKERS

- Use this procedure to raise genuine concerns when they believe that to do so is in the public interest.

Introduction

People who work for or with the council are often the first to realise that there may be something wrong within the Council. However, they may feel unable to express their concerns because they feel that speaking up would be disloyal to their colleagues, managers or to the council. They may also fear harassment or victimisation. They may be worried about raising such issues or they may want to keep the concerns to themselves, perhaps feeling it's none of their business or that it's only a suspicion. They may decide to

Say something but find that they have spoken to the wrong person or raised the issue in the wrong way and are not sure what to do next.

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The council has introduced this policy to enable you to raise your concerns at an early stage and in the right way. We would rather that you raised the matter when it is just a concern rather than wait for proof.

This policy makes it clear that you can raise your concerns without fear of harassment, victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage and is intended to encourage and enable people working for or with the council to raise concerns within the Council rather than overlooking a problem or “blowing the whistle” outside. If something is troubling you which you think we should know about or look into, please use this policy.

This policy applies to all:

- Employees of Denbighshire County Council
- Employees of contractors working for the council on council premises, for example, agency staff, builders, drivers
- Those providing services under a contract or other agreement with the council in their own premises, for example care homes
- Voluntary workers working with the council
- Consultants engaged by the council

Aims and scope of the policy

This policy aims to:

- encourage you to feel confident in raising concerns and to question and act upon concerns about malpractice
- provide avenues for you to raise concerns and receive feedback on any action taken
- ensure that you receive a response to your concerns and that you are aware of how to pursue them if you are not satisfied
- reassure you that you will be protected from reprisals or other action if you have a reasonable belief that you have made any disclosure ‘in the public interest.’

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The Whistleblowing Policy is intended to cover concerns other than your employment, where the interests of others or of the council itself are at risk. These include (but are not limited to):

- conduct which is an offence or a breach of law
- disclosures related to miscarriages of justice
- health and safety risks, including risks to the public as well as other employees
- unlawful discrimination
- damage to the environment
- the unauthorised use of public funds
- possible fraud and corruption
- sexual or physical abuse of clients,
- the neglect, emotional, physical or sexual abuse of children or other inappropriate behaviour towards them
- general safeguarding concerns
- other unethical conduct
- a deliberate attempt to conceal any of the above

Any concerns that you have about any aspect of service provision or the conduct of officers or members of the Council or others acting on behalf of the council can be reported under the Whistleblowing Policy. This may be about something that:

- makes you feel uncomfortable in terms of known standards, your experience or the standards you believe the Council subscribes to; or
- is against the council's Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and policies; or
- falls below established standards of practice; or
- amounts to improper conduct.

The Officers Code of Conduct provides that if an employee becomes aware of activities which he or she believes to be illegal, improper or unethical, the employee should report the matter in accordance with this procedure.

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This policy does not apply in the following circumstances:

Employment Issues

If you are an employee, there are existing procedures in place to enable you to raise concerns relating to your own employment. Refer to the Grievance policy.

Elected Members Conduct

General concerns relating to the behaviour and/or conduct of elected Members should be raised in accordance with the Member's Code of Conduct.

Complaints

This policy does not replace the Corporate Complaints Procedure which is concerned with addressing complaints about council services.

Other Services

If you have any concerns about another organisation that provides services on behalf of the council you should contact the service provider in the first instance. In cases where the council contracts with a private organisation it may be appropriate to notify the relevant Service Area of the council. In some cases it may also be necessary to inform the appropriate regulatory organisation.

Please note that if you are unsure where the issue falls then speak to the responsible officer.

Safeguards – our assurances to you

The council is committed to good practice and high standards and wants to be supportive of employees and others using this policy.

Your legal rights

The Public Interest Disclosure Act (PIDA) (1998) was introduced to protect employees who want to raise a concern about something happening in work in a responsible manner. The Act makes it unlawful for the council to dismiss anyone or allow them to be penalised or

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victimised on the basis that they have made an appropriate lawful disclosure in accordance with the Act.

The Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act (2013) brought about a number of changes which impact on whistleblowing. The three key changes are the following:

- Only disclosures made 'in the public interest' are protected. Employees now have to show that they 'reasonably believe' that the disclosure they are making is in the 'public interest.'
- The removal of the requirement for disclosures to be made in 'good faith' in order to be protected.
- Making employers liable for the acts of employees (such as harassing a colleague who has raised a concern) and making employees personally liable.

Please refer to the below section if you require advice or support on the above.

Support to you

The council recognises that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. If you believe what you are saying is true, you have nothing to fear because you will be doing your duty to your employer and those for whom you are providing a service. You will not be at risk of losing your job or suffering any form of punishment as a result.

The council will not tolerate discrimination, harassment or victimisation (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action, including disciplinary action to protect you when you raise a concern 'in the public interest'.

Any investigations into allegations of potential malpractice raised by you will not influence or be influenced by other procedures such as investigations and hearings under the disciplinary, sickness, capability, redundancy or any other procedures that already affect you or may affect you in the future.

At all times during the raising and investigation of your concerns:

- you will be given full support from Senior Management

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- your concerns will be taken seriously
- the council will do all it can to help you throughout the investigation, e.g. provide advocacy services, interpreters etc.

If appropriate, after full consultation, the council will consider temporarily redeploying you or others for the period of the investigation.

Confidentiality

All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal your identity if you so wish. If the situation arises where we are not able to resolve the concern without revealing your identity you will be informed of this and the reasons why.

Anonymous disclosures

This policy encourages you to put your name to your disclosure whenever possible.

Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful, but will be considered at the discretion of the Monitoring Officer. In exercising this discretion, the factors to be taken into account would include:

- the seriousness of the issues raised
- the credibility of the concern; and
- the likelihood of confirming the disclosure from attributable sources.

Remember that if you do not tell us who you are, it will be much more difficult for us to look into the matter, or to protect your position, or to give you feedback. Accordingly, this policy is better suited to concerns not raised anonymously.

If the Monitoring Officer decides not to pursue an anonymous disclosure he/she will record the reasons for this decision in writing. These decisions will be included in the Monitoring Officer's annual report to Corporate Governance Committee referred to in section 10 below.

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Untrue disclosures

If you make a disclosure 'in the public interest', but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against you. If, however, you make a disclosure frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, disciplinary action may be taken against you.

The question of whether or not a disclosure has been made frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain will be determined by the outcome of the investigation into your concern.

How to raise a concern

The council wishes to ensure that people who have concerns that should be raised under this policy do so. The paragraphs below give examples of how to raise a concern, but are not compulsory. You should raise your concern with whomever you feel most comfortable raising it.

As a first step, we hope you will feel able to raise concerns with your immediate manager.

In some cases it may be more appropriate to raise concerns with someone more senior or directly with one of the internal contacts listed at the end of this document.

This depends, however, on the seriousness and sensitivity of the issues involved and who is suspected of the malpractice. For example, if you believe that your management is involved you should approach the Chief Executive, the Monitoring Officer or the Head of Finance and Audit.

If any information raises concern about harm or potential harm to either children or adults at risk, then these concerns should be reported immediately to the appropriate team. For concerns relating to children contact the Children's' Gateway (01824 712200). For concerns relating to adults at risk, contact or the Single Point of Access Team (0300 456 1000).

If you have serious concerns which you feel unable for whatever reason to raise within the council, you should raise the matter with one of the external contact points referred to at the end of this document.

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Concerns may be expressed verbally or in writing. If you wish to make a written report you are invited to use the following format:

- The background and history of the concern (giving relevant dates)
- The reason why you are particularly concerned about the situation

If you prefer you may use the Whistleblowing policy report form attached to this document and give this to the person with whom you raise your concern.

The earlier you express your concern the easier it is to take action.

Although you are not expected to prove the truth of an allegation, you will need to demonstrate to the person contacted that there are sufficient grounds for your concern. Advice and guidance on how matters of concern may be pursued can be obtained either from your Head of Service, or the Director of Governance and Business (Monitoring Officer).

You may invite your trade union professional association representative, a friend, or someone from an advocacy or translation service to be present during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns you have raised.

How the council will respond

The council will respond to your concerns. Do not forget that testing out your concerns is not the same as either accepting or rejecting them.

The person to whom you report your concerns under this policy must, in turn, report them to the Monitoring Officer within three working days.

The Monitoring Officer will liaise with the Head of Finance and Audit to consider the most appropriate method of investigating the matters of concern raised by you. Please do not attempt to investigate these matters yourself once they have been raised as this could compromise any subsequent investigation into your concern.

In order to protect individuals and those accused of misdeeds or possible malpractice, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what

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form it should take. The overriding principle which the council will have in mind is the public interest. Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of specific procedures (for example, child protection or discrimination issues) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures.

Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation. If urgent action is required this will be taken before any investigation is conducted.

Where appropriate, the matters raised may:

- be investigated internally by management, internal audit, or through the disciplinary process
- be referred to the Police
- be referred to the External Auditor
- form the subject of an independent inquiry

Within ten working days of a concern being raised, you will receive a letter (or information in your preferred format):

- acknowledging that the concern has been received
- indicating how we propose to deal with the matter
- giving an estimate of how long it will take to provide a final response
- telling you whether any initial enquiries have been made;
- supplying you with information on staff support mechanisms, and
- telling you whether further investigations will take place, and if not, why not.

The amount of contact between the officers considering the issues and you will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, further information will be sought from you.

Where any meeting is arranged, off-site if you so wish, you can be accompanied by a Trade Union representative or workplace colleague.

The council will take steps to minimise any difficulties which you may experience as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if you are required to give evidence in criminal or

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disciplinary proceedings, the council will advise you about the procedure and provide you with the necessary support.

The council accepts that you need to be assured that the matter has been properly addressed. You will, subject to legal constraints, receive information about the outcome of any investigations.

Whilst we cannot guarantee that we will respond to all matters in the way that you might wish, we will try to handle the matter fairly, properly and without undue delay. By using this policy, you will help us to achieve this.

Independent advice

If you are still unsure whether or how to raise a concern or you want confidential advice, you can contact the independent charity Public Concern at Work on 020 7404 6609 or at www.pcaaw.co.uk

Their Lawyers can give you free confidential advice on how to raise a concern about serious malpractice at work.

You may prefer to speak to your Trade Union to seek advice about how to raise a concern under this policy. The contact details for the trade unions recognised by the council for collective bargaining purposes are contained in the External contact list attached.

Maintenance and operation of policy

- The Monitoring Officer (Director of Governance and Business) has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this policy.
- The Monitoring Officer maintains a record of concerns raised and the outcomes of investigations in a form which does not end anger your confidentiality.
- The person who receives your concerns must report them to the Monitoring Officer in accordance section 8 above.
- The person who receives the report into the investigation of your concerns must report the outcomes to the Monitoring Officer.

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- The Monitoring Officer will pursue the outcomes of the investigation if they are not reported promptly in accordance with section 10 above.
- The Monitoring Officer will review all concerns and outcomes on a periodic basis to ensure that they have all been investigated in accordance with this policy.
- The Monitoring Officer will report, in a format that does not compromise confidentiality, at least once a year to the Corporate Governance Committee on the operation of this policy, the outcome of the reviews conducted under section 10 above and any changes in practice introduced as a result of a concern raised under this policy.

How the matter will be taken further

This policy is intended to provide you with an avenue within the council to raise concerns. The council hopes you will be satisfied with any action taken. If you are not and if you feel it is right to take the matter outside the council, further possible contact points are given in the External Contact List attached to this document.

If you do take the matter outside the council, you should ensure that you do not disclose information which should properly remain confidential. You will need to confirm this with the person or organisation you decide to contact.

Additional information

Grievance raised during other proceedings e.g. disciplinary, redundancy etc

There may be occasions where an employee, who is subject to another procedure, raises a grievance. The way in which this is handled will depend on the facts of each case. An assessment of the facts should take into account how the grievance is related (if at all) to the matter in hand.

Whether or not the grievance and the ongoing case are associated will be determined by the appointed Deciding Officer of the case.

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Where the grievance and the other case are related

In exceptional circumstances it may be appropriate to temporarily hold the ongoing proceedings while the grievance matter is investigated further. The aim here is to establish whether the complaint has a material impact on the case and eventual outcome.

Be mindful that other ongoing proceedings should not be delayed unnecessarily.

Where the grievance and the other case are not considered to be related

In such cases it is advised that both cases are dealt with separately and that they run concurrently. The proceedings of the case in question may not be impacted by the grievance raised and should therefore be able to continue as planned.

Internal contact list

Advice or guidance about how to pursue matters of concern may be obtained from any of the people named below:

- Chief Executive
- Corporate Director (Economic and Community Ambition)
- Corporate Director (Communities)
- Monitoring Officer, Head of Legal and Democratic Services
- Deputy Monitoring Officer
- Head of Finance and Audit
- Head of Internal Audit
- Chair of Corporate Governance Committee
- Any Head of Service or any local trade union official

Concerns about harm or potential harm to either children or adults at risk should be reported immediately to:

- Children's and Families Gateway (Children) – 01824 712200
- Single Point of Access (Adults) - 0300 456 1000or
- Emergency Duty Team (out of hours) - Tel. No. 0845 0533116

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External contact list

If you have used the appropriate internal procedures and are not satisfied with any action taken in relation to your concerns and if you feel it is right to take the matter outside the Council, further possible contact points are given below. It is stressed that the list below is not exhaustive and you are free to contact any organisation which you feel will be able to deal properly with your concerns.

Organisation	Contact Details
Public Services Ombudsman for Wales	0300 790 0203
Wales Audit Office	02920 320500
North Wales Police	101 or 0300 330 0101
Professional Bodies	
The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy	020 7543 5600
Regulatory Organisations	
Environment Agency	03708 506 506
Health and Safety Executive	0300 003 1747
Care and Social Services Inspectorate for Wales	0300 7900 126
Equality and Human Rights Commission	0808 800 0082
Citizens Advice Bureau	08444 772020
Recognised Trade Unions	
UNITE	01352 733611
UNISON	0800 0 857 857
GMB	01492 535313

If you are unsure whether or how to use this procedure or want independent advice, you may contact the independent charity Public Concern at Work on 020 7404 6609 or at

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www.pcaw.co.uk. Their lawyers can give you free confidential advice at any stage on how to raise a concern about serious malpractice at work.