

**Committee and Date**Audit Committee – 26
June 2025

Item

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Public



Annual Whistleblowing Report 2024/25

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Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):	Cllr, Roger Evans		

1. Synopsis

Whistleblowing provides a process for concerns to be raised in relation to work, such as fraud, adult/child protection or harassment and bullying allegations. This report provides an update to the Shropshire Council Audit Committee on the number of whistleblowing cases raised regarding Council employees over the last financial year.

2. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Whistleblowing “Speaking up about Wrongdoing” process forms a key element of the Councils Corporate Governance arrangements. This report provides an update to the Shropshire Council Audit Committee on the number of cases raised regarding Council employees over the last financial year (excluding school-based employees).
- 2.2 The Whistleblowing Policy is available to all staff via the Intranet pages and is also available to them, along with members, contractors, partners and the public, via the [website](#); allowing it to be accessed from any computer
- 1.3 In 2024/25 there were twenty-eight whistleblowing reports, this is an increase of five compared to the previous year.

- 1.4 Whistleblowing reports in 2024/2025 have been predominately via email. The most reported theme was staffing. No cases were referred to an external third party.
- 1.5 The Council Whistleblowing process provides an effective route to enable employees, elected members, contractors and others to raise concerns about fraud, corruption, adult/child protection or harassment and bullying allegations.

3. Recommendations

The Audit Committee is asked to:

- 3.1. Consider and approve, with appropriate comments on the contents of the report

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 4.1. The Council has in place an effective Counter Fraud, Bribery and Anti-Corruption Strategy. The Council proactively encourages the detection of fraud and irregularities and the appropriate management of them. The Whistleblowing policies contribute to our zero tolerance of fraud, bribery and corruption.
- 4.2. The recommendations contained in this report are compatible with the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998. There are no direct environmental, equalities, consultation or climate change consequences of this proposal.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1. Shropshire Council continues to manage unprecedented financial demands as budgeted for within the Medium Term Financial Strategy approved by Council on 27 February 2025 and subsequent updates. It is also addressed in our monitoring position presented to Cabinet on a monthly basis. Significant management action has and continues to be undertaken to ensure the Council's financial survival. While all reports provide the financial implications of decisions being taken, this may change as officers review the overall financial situation and make decisions aligned to financial survivability. Where non-essential spend is identified within the Council, this will be reduced. This may involve
 - scaling down initiatives,
 - changing the scope,
 - delaying implementation, or
 - extending delivery timescales.
- 5.2. The management and investigation of issues raised in response to this policy are met from approved budgets.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1. This report does not directly make decisions on energy and fuel consumption; renewable energy generation; carbon offsetting or mitigation; or on climate change adaption. Therefore, no effect

7. Background

- 7.1. This is an annual report to Audit Committee on whistleblowing arrangements.
- 7.2. The Whistleblowing Policy is available to all staff via the Intranet pages and is also available to them, along with members, contractors, partners and the public, via the [website](#); allowing it to be accessed from any computer/mobile device. This is particularly important as it allows staff to access the policy outside of a work environment, where they may be reluctant to be seen accessing the Whistleblowing policy.
- 7.3. Whistleblowing is when a worker reports suspected wrongdoing at work. Officially this is called 'making a disclosure in the public interest'. A worker can report things that aren't right, are illegal or if anyone at work is neglecting their duties, including:
- someone's health and safety is in danger
 - damage to the environment
 - a criminal offence
 - the company isn't obeying the law (like not having the right insurance)
 - covering up wrongdoing.
- 7.4. The way a worker can 'blow the whistle' on wrongdoing depends on whether they feel they can tell their employer.
1. The worker should check their employment contract or ask Human Resources if their company has a whistleblowing procedure.
 2. If they feel they can, they should contact their employer about the issue they want to report.
 3. If they can't tell their employer, they should contact a prescribed person or body.
- 7.5. A worker can only tell the prescribed person or body if they think their employer:
- will cover it up
 - would treat them unfairly if they complained
 - hasn't sorted it out and they've already told them

7.6. Dismissals and whistleblowing

A worker can't be dismissed because of whistleblowing. If they are, they can claim unfair dismissal. They'll be protected by law as long as certain criteria are met.

7.7. Types of whistleblowing eligible for protection

These are called 'qualifying disclosures'. They include when someone reports:

- that someone's health and safety is in danger
- damage to the environment
- a criminal offence
- that the company isn't obeying the law (like not having the right insurance)
- that someone's covering up wrongdoing
- a miscarriage of justice

7.8. Who is protected?

The following people are protected:

- employees
- agency workers
- people that are training with an employer, but not employed
- self-employed workers, if supervised or working off-site
- An individual is also protected if they work in a school or sixth-form college, whether an employee or an agency worker. NHS workers who work under certain contractual arrangements, e.g., certain GPs and dentists, are also protected.

A worker will be eligible for protection if:

- they honestly think what they're reporting is true
- they think they're telling the right person
- they believe that their disclosure is in the public interest

7.9. Who isn't protected?

Workers aren't protected from dismissal if:

- they break the law when they report something, e.g., they signed the Official Secrets Act
- they found out about the wrongdoing when someone wanted legal advice ('legal professional privilege'), e.g., if they're a solicitor
- Workers who aren't employees can't claim unfair dismissal because of whistleblowing, but they are protected and can claim 'detrimental treatment'.

7.10. Tribunals

Workers dismissed for whistleblowing can go to an employment tribunal. If the tribunal decides the employee has been unfairly dismissed, it will order that they are:

- reinstated (get their job back)
- paid compensation

A tribunal judge can reduce any compensation awarded by 25% if they find the person has acted dishonestly.

A whistleblower who is bullied at work will also be able to bring a claim to the employment tribunal against their employer or colleagues

8. Additional Information

8.1. In 2024/25, there were twenty-eight cases reported under the whistleblowing arrangements for Shropshire Council. Reports have predominately been received via email (twenty), with phone (six) and letter (two) accounting for the reports received this year. The most reported theme was staffing related (eleven).

8.2. 2024/2025 Table of Whistleblowing reports and outcomes

Theme	Number
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Staffing issues	11
Council Tax/NDR	7
Other	4
Safeguarding	2
Tenancy Fraud	2
Theft/Fraud	1
Planning/Building Control	1
Outcomes for all themes	Number
Management Action	10
Ongoing	10
No case to answer	7
N/A	1
Method of Communication	Number
Email	20
Phone	6
Letter	2

8.3. Comparison to previous years

8.3.1. There has been a 22% increase in the number of incidents reported than in the preceding year, this is an increase of five cases. The preferred route of “blowing the whistle” in 2024/25 being via email. The number of incidents reported in the last five years are shown in Table 8.3.5. The number of cases reported can fluctuate year on year. The policy is periodically reflected in email updates and news items on the Intranet throughout the year.

8.3.2. When comparing the route of report to previous years, from 2020/21 the reports via email increased, this is reflective of the increase in hybrid working since 2020. In 21/22 all reports were via email. Prior to 2020 verbal reports were often a preferred route to raise concerns. In 2023/24 eight reports were received via email and thirteen via phone. In 2024/25 twenty were received by email and six via phone.

8.3.3. In 2023/24 the themes of the cases reported was more evenly split, with similar numbers of cases being reported for staffing, council tax, financial incident and safeguarding concerns. In 2024/25 the most reported theme was staffing (eleven) and Council Tax/NDR (seven).

8.3.4. There has been an increase in the number of staffing cases reported. In 2023/24 there were five staffing related cases raised via whistleblowing, this was similar to the number raised in 2022/23 where four staffing related cases were raised, and in 2021/22 one staffing related case was raised. In 2024/25 eleven cases were raised, an increase of six cases. Staffing related cases cover a range of concerns relating to employees and can cover work related conduct both in and outside of work.

8.3.5. Table of Whistleblowing Reports for last five years

Year	Case	% Change
24-25	28	22% increase
23-24	23	21% decrease
22-23	29	14% increase
21-22	25	29% decrease
20-21	35	43% increase

9. Conclusions

- 9.1. The 'Speaking up about Wrongdoing' process remains a vital component of Shropshire Council's Corporate Governance framework. It continues to serve as an effective channel for employees, elected members, contractors, partners, and others to raise concerns about fraud, corruption, adult/child protection, or harassment and bullying allegations. The increase in whistleblowing reports this year, particularly those related to staffing, underscores the importance of maintaining and promoting this process. The Council's commitment to transparency and accountability is evident in its proactive approach to managing and investigating these reports, ensuring that all concerns are addressed promptly and appropriately

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Local Member: *Cabinet Member Cllr Heather Kidd (Leader of the Council)*
Cllr Duncan Kerr (Chair of Audit Committee)
Cllr Roger Evans (Portfolio Holder Finance)

Appendices NA