



**Committee and Date**

Audit Committee  
Date 25 June 2026

Item

Public

## Annual Whistleblowing Report 2025/26

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<b>Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):</b>	<b><i>Cllr Roger Evans</i></b>		

### 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

- 2.1 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
- 2.3 In 2025/26 there were forty-one whistleblowing reports, this is an increase of thirteen compared to the previous year.
- 2.4 Whistleblowing reports in 2025/26 have been predominately via email. The most reported theme was council tax/NDR. Four cases were referred to an external third party.
- 2.5 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:

- a. 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. 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 adaptation. 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 occurs when a worker and/or individual reports suspected wrongdoing in the public interest. This may include concerns about:
  - risks to health and safety
  - environmental damage
  - criminal offences
  - breaches of the law
  - attempts to conceal wrongdoing

- 7.4 The route for raising a concern depends on whether the worker feels able to report it to their employer. They should first check their contract or ask Human Resources whether a whistleblowing procedure is in place. If they feel able, they should report the matter to their employer. If not, they may report it to a prescribed person or body.
- 7.5 A worker may report concerns to a prescribed person or body if they believe their employer will conceal the wrongdoing, treat them unfairly for reporting it, or has failed to act after the matter was raised.
- 7.6 A worker must not be dismissed for whistleblowing. If they are, they may claim unfair dismissal, provided the legal criteria for protection are met.
- 7.7 Protected whistleblowing disclosures, known as *qualifying disclosures*, include concerns about:
- risks to health and safety
  - environmental damage
  - criminal offences
  - breaches of the law
  - concealment of wrongdoing
  - miscarriages of justice
- 7.8 Protection applies to employees, agency workers, trainees, and some self-employed workers who are supervised or work off-site. It also covers school and sixth-form college workers, and some NHS workers under specific contractual arrangements. A worker is protected if they reasonably believe the information is true, that they are reporting it to the appropriate person, and that the disclosure is in the public interest.
- 7.9 Protection against dismissal does not apply where the worker breaks the law in making the disclosure, for example by breaching the Official Secrets Act, or where the information is protected by legal professional privilege. Workers who are not employees cannot claim unfair dismissal, but they may claim detrimental treatment.
- 7.10 A worker dismissed for whistleblowing may bring a claim to an employment tribunal. If the tribunal finds the dismissal unfair, it may order reinstatement or compensation. Compensation may be reduced by up to 25% if the tribunal finds the worker acted dishonestly. Workers who are bullied for whistleblowing may also bring a tribunal claim against their employer or colleagues.

## 8. Additional Information

### 8.1 2025/26 Whistleblowing Reports

- 8.1.1 In 2025/26, there were forty-one cases reported under the whistleblowing arrangements for Shropshire Council. Reports have predominately been received via email (thirty-five), with phone (three) and letter (three) accounting for the reports

received this year. The most reported theme was in relation to Council tax/NDR (fourteen).

### 8.1.2 2025/2026 Table of Whistleblowing reports and outcomes

Theme	Number
Council Tax/NDR	14
Staffing	8
Benefits	7
Theft/Fraud	4
Safeguarding	4
Tenancy Fraud	2
Other	2
Outcomes for all themes	Number
No Case to Answer (NCTA)	10
Third Party Referral	4
Management Action	2
Recovery	2
Managed via other procedure/policy	1
Ongoing	22
Method of Communication	Number
Email	35
Phone	3
Letter	3

### 8.2 Comparison to previous years

8.2.1 There has been a 46% increase in the number of incidents reported than in the preceding year, this is an increase of thirteen cases. The preferred route of “blowing the whistle” in 2025/26 being via email. The number of incidents reported in the last five years are shown in Table 8.2.5. 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.

8.2.2 When comparing the route of report to previous years, reporting routes have shifted noticeably over recent years. In 2021/22, all reports were submitted via email. Prior to 2020, verbal reporting was often the preferred route; the move towards email reporting reflects the increase in hybrid working arrangements since 2020. In 2022/23, reports were received through a mix of channels (11 email, 16 phone, 2 letter). In 2023/24, this pattern narrowed, with reports primarily via phone (13) and email (8). In 2024/25, email became the preferred route again, with twenty reports submitted by email and six by phone, indicating a continued preference for email reporting methods.

### 8.2.3 Table of Whistleblowing Reports for last five years

Year	Case	% Change
25-26	41	46% increase

24-25	28	22% increase
23-24	23	21% decrease
22-23	29	16% increase
21-22	25	29% decrease

8.2.4 The number of whistleblowing cases has fluctuated over the past five years, with a marked increase in the most recent year. These fluctuations can be viewed in the context of whistleblowing as a positive indicator of confidence in reporting arrangements rather than solely as a measure of wrongdoing. In particular, the increase in 2025/26 is likely to reflect increased awareness of whistleblowing routes, greater confidence that concerns will be taken seriously, and improved accessibility of reporting mechanisms, rather than symbolise a rise in wrongdoing. This is evidenced by just over half of the investigated reports resulting in NCTA.

**8.3 Key developments in Whistleblowing legislation 2025/26**

- 8.3.1 In 2025/26, there were significant developments in the UK whistleblowing framework relevant to the Council’s approach, including a government [review of whistleblowing framework](#) new statutory protections from April 2026, and the publication of a new [Anti Corruption Strategy](#).
- 8.3.2 On 14 July 2025, the Department for Business and Trade published its review of the effectiveness of the whistleblowing framework in Great Britain, signalling continued national focus on the adequacy of whistleblowing protections and arrangements.
- 8.3.3 From April 2026, sexual harassment is treated as a qualifying disclosure under updated whistleblowing protections, strengthening protection for workers who raise such concerns. [Strengthening protections for whistleblowers](#)
- 8.3.4 The Economic Crime and Corporate Transparency Act 2023, reinforces the need for effective internal whistleblowing arrangements. In particular, the new failure to prevent fraud offence from 01 September 2025 which increases the importance of proportionate controls, including clear and trusted routes for raising concerns. [Offence of 'failure to prevent fraud' introduced by ECCTA](#)
- 8.3.5 These developments underline the importance of maintaining accessible, well-promoted and effective whistleblowing arrangements as part of the Council’s wider governance, fraud prevention and assurance framework.

**8.4 Planned Activities for coming year**

Planned activity for 2026/27 will focus on further strengthening staff awareness of, and confidence in, the Council’s whistleblowing arrangements. Key actions will include refreshed induction content, a coordinated programme of internal communications, the use of building-based posters and mandatory training on bullying and harassment in the workplace, including clear guidance on how to raise concerns and speak up safely. Communications activity will be aligned with national awareness initiatives, including Whistleblowers Awareness Month in June 2026.

## 9. Conclusions

- 9.1 The 2025/26 reporting year demonstrates that the Council's 'Speaking up about Wrongdoing' process forms a key element of the Councils Corporate Governance arrangements. The procedure remains visible, accessible and effective, with an increase in disclosures indicating continued confidence in the process. While the volume and themes of cases vary from year to year, the arrangements continue to provide an important mechanism for identifying concerns at an early stage and supporting appropriate action. Continued promotion of the policy, alongside training and awareness activity in 2026/27, will help ensure that employees, elected members, contractors, partners and all other relevant parties remain confident to speak up safely and in the public interest.

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

**None**

None

**Local Member:** *Cabinet Member Cllr Heather Kidd (Leader of the Council)*  
*Cllr Sharon Ritchie-Simmons (Chair of Audit Committee)*  
*Cllr Roger Evans (Portfolio Holder Finance)*

**Appendices:**

N/A