

Report to: **Audit Committee**  
Date: **10 March 2022**  
Title: **Review of Confidential Reporting Policy**  
Portfolio Area: **Cllr Pearce – Leader of the Council**  
Wards Affected: **All**  
Urgent Decision: **N** Approval and clearance obtained: **Y**

**Council 31 March  
2022**

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**Recommendations:**

**That the Audit Committee recommends that the Council adopts the reviewed Confidential Reporting Policy and related Frequently Asked Questions attached at Appendices 1 and 2**

**1. Executive summary**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to ask the Audit Committee to review the attached Confidential Reporting Policy (sometimes referred to as the Whistle-blowing Policy), associated Frequently Asked Questions, and recommend their adoption to Council.
- 1.2 It is important that the Council regularly reviews its Confidential Reporting Policy to ensure that it is fit for purpose and reflects both current legislation and best practice, and supports the Council's practices in relation to this important issue.

**2. Background**

- 2.1 The Confidential Reporting Policy is attached at Appendix 1 along with the Frequently Asked Question to help staff at Appendix 2.

- 2.1 This Policy allows workers employed by the Council to 'blow the whistle' on fraud, corruption, abuse or other inappropriate action or behaviour by someone inside, or working for, the Council. The Policy is designed to protect the 'whistle-blower' from potential adverse consequences.
- 2.2 Whilst the Confidential Reporting Policy was last reviewed in 2019 by Statutory Officers to ensure continuing compliance with the law and best practice, the Audit Committee has not formally reviewed this Policy since its adoption in 2016.
- 2.3 Only minor amendments have been required to the Policy to reflect current practice and reporting structures and it remains fit for purpose.
- 2.4 In the Auditor's Annual Report for 2020/21 presented to the Audit Committee in October 2021, Grant Thornton recommended that the Council should review its Confidential Reporting Policy annually and update as necessary. This ensures that the Policy is up to date and ensures good governance, minimising risk to the Council.

### **3. Outcomes/outputs**

- 3.1 The Council needs to ensure that its Policies are up to date with legislative requirements and best practice, and also reflect how the Council operates, and this is achieved by regular review by the Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer and more formally, by the Audit Committee through its responsibilities for governance and regulatory frameworks.
- 3.2 Through a review of the Council's governance policies the Council minimises the risk of misconduct, fraud and corruption which is reinforced by raising awareness of these issues with all staff and providing a robust mechanism for prevention and reporting real or alleged incidents.
- 3.3 All staff will be required to complete an on line E-Learning module on the Confidential Reporting Policy as part of the Essential Learning Pathway Programme. This Programme is part of the Council's commitment to the personal continuous improvement of our staff and for strong governance throughout the organisation. It is intended that all staff complete this Module annually in May.
- 3.4 The reviewed policies will be available on the staff intranet and the internet.

### **4. Options available and consideration of risk**

- 4.1 The Council has a duty to regular monitor and review this Policy to ensure continuing good governance, and the Council would be failing in this duty if the Policy is not reviewed.

## 5. Proposed Way Forward

- 5.1 The Audit Committee is requested to consider the reviewed Policy and frequently asked questions attached at Appendices 1 and 2 and recommend their approval to the Council.

## 6. Implications

Implications	Relevant to proposals Y/N	Details and proposed measures to address
Legal/Governance	Y	<p>The Policy is required by the Public Interest Disclose Act 1998 and the Council's Constitution</p> <p>The Audit Committee has a responsibility to consider and review its governance and regulatory policies and make any necessary recommendations to the Council. The policies and documents attached at Appendices 1 and 2 have been reviewed and only minor amendments have been made to reflect the Council's current structure and ways of working, and they otherwise remain fit for purpose.</p>
Financial implications to include reference to value for money	N	There are no direct financial implications to the review of these documents.
Risk	Y	<p>This Report identifies that the Council has a duty to regularly review its policy documentation to minimise risk of fraud, and corruption to ensure that there are robust mechanisms of which staff are aware to prevent, detect, and investigate these issues where appropriate.</p> <p>Failure to do so will increase the risk to the Council through challenge, malpractice and potential damage to the Council's reputation.</p>
Supporting Corporate Strategy		Quality Council Services
Climate Change - Carbon / Biodiversity Impact	N	No direct carbon/biodiversity impact arising from the recommendations.

Comprehensive Impact Assessment Implications		
Equality and Diversity		Contained within the Policy
Safeguarding		N/a
Community Safety, Crime and Disorder		Considered within the Policy
Health, Safety and Wellbeing		Considered within the Policy
Other implications		N/a

**Supporting Information**

**Appendices:**

Appendix 1: Confidential Reporting Policy

Appendix 2: Confidential Reporting Policy Frequently Asked Questions

**Background Papers:**

None