



Green The Environment (GTE)

Whistle Blowing Policy



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Whistle blowing policy of Green The Environment (GTE)

1. What is Whistle blowing?

In this policy 'Whistle blowing' means the reporting by employees of suspected misconduct, illegal acts or failure to act within the Council.

The aim of this Policy is to encourage employees and others who have serious concerns about any aspect of the Council's work to come forward and voice those concerns.

Employees are often the first to realize that there may be something seriously wrong within the Council. 'Whistle blowing' is viewed by the Council as a positive act that can make a valuable contribution to the Council's efficiency and long-term success. It is not disloyal to colleagues or the Council to speak up. The Council is committed to achieving the highest possible standards of service and the highest possible ethical standards in public life and in all of its practices. To help achieve these standards it encourages freedom of speech.

If you are considering raising a concern you should read this Policy first. It explains:

the type of issues that can be raised

how the person raising a concern will be protected from victimization and harassment

how to raise a concern, and

what the Council will do.

If you are unsure whether to use this Policy or want independent advice at any stage, you may contact GTE. GTE's advisers can give you free confidential advice on how to raise a concern about serious malpractice at work.

2. What is the aim of the Policy and when does it apply?

2.1. Aims of the Policy

GTE has designed the policy to ensure that you can raise your concerns about wrongdoing or malpractice within the Council without fear of victimization, subsequent discrimination, disadvantage or dismissal.

It is also intended to encourage and enable you to raise serious concerns within the Council rather than ignoring a problem or 'blowing the whistle' outside.

This Policy aims to:

- encourage you to feel confident in raising serious concerns at the earliest opportunity and to question and act upon concerns about practice

- provide avenues for you to raise those 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 possible reprisals or victimization if you have made any disclosure in good faith.

2.2. Scope of this Policy

This Policy is intended to enable those who become aware of wrongdoing in the County Council affecting some other person or service, to report their concerns at the earliest opportunity so that they can be properly investigated.

The Whistleblowing Policy is not intended to replace existing procedures:

- if your concern relates to your own treatment as an employee, you should raise it under the existing grievance or harassment procedures

- if a client has a concern about services provided to him/her, it should be raised as a complaint to the County Council

complaints of misconduct by County Councillors are dealt with under a separate procedure (for further information please contact the Council's Monitoring Officer).

2.3. Who can raise a concern under this Policy?

The Policy applies to all:

employees of Nottinghamshire County Council*

employees of contractors working for the Council, for example, agency staff, builders and drivers

employees of suppliers

those providing services under a contract or other agreement with the Council in their own premises, for example, care homes, and

voluntary workers working with the Council.

* If you are employed in, working with or assisting Nottinghamshire schools there is a specific whistleblowing code for you because of the special relationship that exists with the schools' governing bodies.

2.4. What should be reported?

Any serious concerns that you have about service provision or the conduct of officers or members of the Council or others acting on behalf of the Council that:

make you feel uncomfortable in terms of known standards

are not in keeping with the County Council's Constitution and policies

fall below established standards of practice; or

are improper behaviour.

These might relate to:

conduct which is an offence or a breach of the law (a criminal offence has been committed or failing to comply with any other legal obligation)

disclosures related to miscarriages of justice
racial, sexual, disability or other discrimination
health and safety of the public and/or other employees
damage to the environment
unauthorized use of public funds or other assets
possible fraud and corruption
neglect or abuse of clients, or
other unethical conduct.

This list is not exhaustive.

3. Protecting the Whistleblower

3.1. Legal rights

The Act makes it unlawful for the Council to dismiss anyone or allow them to be victimized on the basis that they have made an appropriate lawful disclosure in accordance with the Act.

Rarely, a case might arise where it is the employee that has participated in the action causing concern. In such a case it is in the employee's interest to come into the open as soon as possible. The Council cannot promise not to act against such an employee, but the fact that they came forward may be taken into account.

3.2. Harassment or victimization

The Council is committed to good practice and high standards and to being supportive of you as an employee.

The Council recognizes that the decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make. If you honestly and reasonably believe what you are saying is true, you should have nothing to fear because you will be doing your duty to your employer, your colleagues and those for whom you are providing a service.

The Council will not tolerate any harassment or victimization of a whistleblower (including informal pressures) and will take appropriate action to protect you when you raise a concern in good faith and will treat this as a serious disciplinary offence which will be dealt with under the disciplinary rules and procedure.

3.3. Support to you

Throughout this process:

you will be given full support from Senior Management

your concerns will be taken seriously; and

the County Council will do all it can to help you throughout the investigation.

If appropriate, the Council will consider temporarily re-deploying you for the period of the investigation.

For those who are not County Council employees, the Council will endeavour to provide appropriate advice and support wherever possible.

3.4. Confidentiality

All concerns will be treated in confidence and every effort will be made not to reveal your identity if that is your wish. If disciplinary or other proceedings follow the investigation, it may not be possible to take action as a result of your disclosure without your help, so you may be asked to come forward as a witness. If you agree to this, you will be offered advice and support.

3.5. Anonymous allegations

This Policy encourages you to put your name to your allegation whenever possible. If you do not tell us who you are it will be much more difficult for us to protect your position or to give you feedback. This Policy is not ideally suited to concerns raised anonymously.

Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful but they may be considered at the discretion of the Council. In exercising this discretion the factors to be taken into account would include:

the seriousness of the issue raised

the credibility of the concern; and

the likelihood of confirming the allegation from other sources.

3.6. Untrue allegations

If you make an allegation in good faith and reasonably believing it to be true, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, the County Council will recognize your concern and you have nothing to fear. If however, you make an allegation frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain, appropriate action that could include disciplinary action, may be taken.

4.2. How to raise a concern

You may raise your concern by telephone, in person or in writing. The earlier you express your concern, the easier it is to take action. You will need to provide the following information:

the nature of your concern and why you believe it to be true

the background and history of the concern (giving relevant dates).

Although you are not expected to prove beyond doubt the truth of your suspicion, you will need to demonstrate to the person contacted that you are acting in good faith and there are reasonable grounds for your concern.

You may wish to consider discussing your concern with a colleague first and you may find it easier to raise the matter if there are two (or more) of you who have had the same experience or concerns.

You may invite your trade union, professional association representative or a friend to be present for support during any meetings or interviews in connection with the concerns you have raised.

5. What the Management will do

The Management of GTE will respond to your concerns as quickly as possible. Do not forget that testing your concerns is not the same as either accepting or rejecting them.

The overriding principle for the Council will be the public interest. In order to be fair to all employees, including those who may be wrongly or mistakenly accused, initial enquiries will be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take.

The investigation may need to be carried out under terms of strict confidentiality, i.e. by not informing the subject of the complaint until (or if) it becomes necessary to do so. In certain cases however, such as allegations of ill treatment of others, suspension from work may have to be considered immediately. Protection of others is paramount in all cases.

Where appropriate, the matters raised may:

be investigated by management, internal audit, or through the disciplinary /grievance process

be referred to the police

be referred to the external auditor

be referred and put through established child protection/abuse procedures

form the subject of an independent inquiry.

Within ten working days of a concern being raised, the person investigating your concern will write to you:

acknowledging that the concern has been received

indicating how the County Council proposes to deal with the matter
supplying you with information on staff support mechanisms
telling you whether further investigations will take place and if not, why not.

The amount of contact between you and the officers considering the issues will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of your information. It is likely that you will be interviewed to ensure that your disclosure is fully understood.

Any meeting can be arranged away from your workplace, if you wish, and a union or professional association representative or a friend may accompany you in support.

The Council will do what it can to minimise any difficulties that you may experience as a result of raising a concern. For instance, if you are asked to give evidence in criminal or disciplinary proceedings, the Council will arrange for you to receive appropriate advice and support.

You need to be assured that your disclosure has been properly addressed. Unless there are any legal reasons why this cannot be done, you will be kept informed of the progress and outcome of any investigation.

6. The responsible officer

The Monitoring Officer has overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of this Policy.

7. How the matter can 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 raise concerns outside the management you should ensure that it is to one of these prescribed contacts. A public disclosure to anyone else could take you outside the protection of the Public Interest Disclosure Act and of this Policy.

You should not disclose information that is confidential to the management or to anyone else, such as a client or contractor of the Council, except to those included in the list of prescribed contacts.

This Policy does not prevent you from taking your own legal advice.

8. Review of the Policy

GTE's Standards Committee will review this Policy annually.

9. Corporate Recording and Monitoring

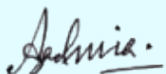
The Monitoring Officer will maintain a corporate register containing all concerns that are brought to her attention. All officers allocated to look into a concern must ensure the Monitoring Officer is provided with sufficient details for the corporate register.

The Monitoring Officer will review the corporate register and produce an annual report for the Chief Executive and the Standards Committee. The report will include a summary of the concerns raised, to which department they related, the post to which the concerns related (if not confidential) and any lessons learned. The report will not include any employee names. The aim of this is to ensure that:

the management and/or the relevant department learns from mistakes and does not repeat them, and

consistency of approach across the departments.

The corporate register together with the annual reports will be available for inspection by internal and external audit, after removing any confidential details.



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