

During the Investigation you will be:

- given information on progress to date, and
- told whether further investigations will be made, and if not, the reasons why.

What other contact will there be with me?

The amount of contact between the officer(s) considering the issues and you will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information you provide. If necessary, you will be asked for further information. This will be done discreetly. You have the right to be accompanied by a Trade Union or other representative at any meeting. The meeting can be off site if you prefer.

How will the Council support me?

The Council will take steps to minimise any difficulties which you may experience as a result of raising a concern and provide any appropriate support including the Council's confidential Counselling Service.

How will I know the outcome?

The Council understands that you need to be assured that the matter has been properly dealt with. Unless there is a legal reason why it can't be done, you will receive information about the outcomes of investigations and any changes to procedures that have been made.

What if I fear harassment or victimisation? How will I be protected?

The decision to report a concern can be a difficult one to make, not least because of the fear of reprisal from those responsible for the malpractice. The Council will not tolerate harassment or victimisation as outlined in its "Dignity at Work Policy" and will take action to protect you when you raise a concern in the public interest.

What if I change my mind?

You may withdraw from the process at any stage, although your involvement may still be required in certain circumstances such as ongoing disciplinary or legal proceedings. If you do wish to withdraw you or your representative must inform the person with whom you raised the initial concern and the investigating officer. You will be requested to provide a reason/(s) for your withdrawal.

How can I be assured of confidentiality?

The Council will endeavour to maintain confidentiality where possible, but this cannot be guaranteed. Depending on the nature of the concern in order to undertake a proper investigation confidential information may have to be shared with a third party, including the party or parties' subject of the concern. You will be informed if this is necessary.

What if my concern is unfounded?

If you raise an issue in the public interest, but it is not confirmed by the investigation, no action will be taken against you. If, however, you make malicious allegations, disciplinary action may be taken against employees and members will be referred to the Monitoring Officer and will be dealt with under the appropriate procedures.

What if a concern is raised about me?

You will be informed of the concern following initial investigations if it is considered that there is an issue to be investigated. You will be supported in an appropriate manner and will be informed of progress.

What if I am not satisfied with the outcome?

This policy provides you with an avenue to raise concerns within the Council. The Council hopes you will be satisfied with the response to your concern. If you are not satisfied you must inform the Managing Director, with the reasons for your dissatisfaction.

Contacts:

- Your Local Council Member (if you are an employee and live in the area of the Council) - if you are not sure who this is contact Member Services on **380110**
- External Auditor - KPMG **0121 335 2440**
- Relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations
- The Local Government Ombudsman **0300 061 0614** (www.lgo.org.uk)
- The Health & Safety Executive www.hse.gov.uk
- Your solicitor
- The Police **08457 444888**
- Public Concern at Work **0207 404 6609** (www.pcaw.co.uk)
- Trade Union/Professional Association – details are available from People Services.

Copies of the full Speak Up Policy can be found on the Intranet under Internal Audit, Whistleblowing.

Speak Up Hotline
01952 383115

January 2014 Edition



**A guide to the
Speak Up Policy**

Speak Up

What is the policy about?

The Policy is intended to encourage you as an employee, elected member, volunteer, school governor, partner, supplier or contractor to raise issues that are of serious concern within the Council. The Council needs you to speak up rather than ignoring something that may require action. The policy aims to:

- encourage you to feel confident in raising concerns and to question and act upon concerns about malpractice;
- encourage you to raise these concerns as soon as they arise so that appropriate action can be taken;
- provide avenues for you to raise those concerns within the Council and receive feedback on any action taken;
- allow you to take the matter further if you are dissatisfied with the Council's response; and
- reassure you that we will take action to protect you from reprisals or victimisation for speaking up in the public interest.

What if my concern is about my employment?

The Council's grievance procedure is in place to enable employees to lodge a grievance relating to their employment.

What types of concern does the Speak Up Policy cover?

A concern may be something that you think

- is unlawful;
- is against the Council's Constitution, Standing Orders, Financial Regulations and policies;
- is improper use of public funds;
- is below the established standards or values of the Council;
- amounts to improper conduct.

Examples of concerns include:

- possible fraud and corruption,
- theft,
- dangerous procedures risking health and safety,
- abuse of clients/pupils,
- evasion of statutory responsibilities,
- damage to the environment,
- discriminatory behaviour,
- other perceived unethical conduct.

The overriding principle should be that it would be in the public interest for the practice to be corrected and, if appropriate, sanctions applied.

How do I raise a concern?

If you are an employee, volunteer or partner you may raise the matter with:

- your supervisor or Service Delivery Manager/appropriate member of the Senior Management team,
- your Head of Establishment/Headteacher,
- the Audit & Information Governance (IG) Manager,
- the Council's Monitoring Officer (Assistant Director – Law, Democracy & People Services),
- a Trade Union Representative

What if my concern involves my line manager?

If your concern is connected with your direct line manager/supervisor then your People Services Officer will provide confidential advice on who best to contact.

If you are a school governor you may raise the matter with:

- the Director of Children and Family Services, Assistant Director: Education & Corporate Parenting, the Audit & IG Manager or the Monitoring Officer.

If you are a supplier or contractor you may raise the matter with:

- the Strategic Procurement Manager,
- the Council's Monitoring Officer, or
- the Audit & IG Manager

If you are an elected member you may raise the matter with:

- the Council's Monitoring Officer

Does the concern have to be in writing?

Concerns are better in writing (written or email). You should set out the background and history of the concern giving names, dates and places where possible, and the reason why you are particularly concerned about the situation.

What if I do not feel able to put the concern in writing?

If you do not feel able to put your concern in writing, you can telephone or meet with the appropriate officer as specified above. Alternatively you can leave a message on the 24 hour Audit Services answer phone number **01952 383115**. This service is secure and you do not have to give your name if you do not want to, although it is helpful if you do so as further information may be needed.

The earlier you express the concern and the more detail you provide, the easier it will be to take action. At this stage you are not expected to prove the allegation but you will need to

demonstrate to the person contacted that there are sufficient grounds for your concern.

Can I remain anonymous?

This policy encourages you to put your name to your concerns. Anonymous allegations will be considered and action taken where appropriate. However it is much more difficult to properly investigate matters raised anonymously. The Speak Up Policy is designed to protect those raising genuinely held concerns and the policy encourages them to identify themselves. Feedback relating to an investigation based on an issue raised anonymously is not possible as no contact details are known. Factors taken into account when establishing the scope of an anonymous investigation include:

- the seriousness of the issues raised;
- the credibility of the concern;
- the likelihood of confirming the allegation in a satisfactory manner.

Can I ask someone else to raise the concern on my behalf?

YES. You may ask your Trade Union or other representative to raise a matter on your behalf.

What will happen if I raise a concern?

This will depend on what it is. The matters raised maybe:

- investigated internally by an appropriately skilled and experienced officer, knowledgeable in the area concerned;
- referred to the Police;
- referred to the External Auditor or the Local Government Ombudsman

To protect individuals and the Council, initial enquiries will always be made to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take.

Concerns or allegations that fall within the scope of specific procedures (for example, child protection, discrimination issues or other specific protocols) will normally be referred for consideration under those procedures. Some concerns may be resolved by agreed action without the need for investigation.

What is the procedure if I raise a concern?

Within ten working days of a concern being received the person you raised the concern with will write to you:

- acknowledging the concern has been received;
- indicating how it is proposed to deal with the matter;
- giving an estimate of how long it may take to complete the investigation; and
- if the matter is not to be investigated, the reason why.