

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO STANDARDS COMMITTEE

23 SEPTEMBER 2021

REPORT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to enable the Standards Committee to review the operation of the Council's Whistleblowing Policy.

2. Connection to corporate well-being objectives / other corporate priorities

- 2.1 This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate well-being objectives under the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**:

1. **Supporting a successful sustainable economy** – taking steps to make the county borough a great place to do business, for people to live, work, study and visit, and to ensure that our schools are focused on raising the skills, qualifications and ambitions for all people in the county borough.
2. **Helping people and communities to be more healthy and resilient** - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives.
3. **Smarter use of resources** – ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.

- 2.2 The Whistleblowing Policy directly contributes to maintaining the probity of the Council and its ability to process the Corporate Plan and all Corporate Priorities.

3. Background

- 3.1 Whistleblowing is a report from an employee, member or other person about suspected wrongdoing within the organisation. The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 requires employers to refrain from dismissing workers and employees or subjecting them to any other detriment because they have made a protected disclosure.

- 3.2 Members are aware that the Council has a Whistleblowing Policy (attached as **Appendix 1**), which is designed to encourage and reassure employees who genuinely and reasonably believe that there are concerns, which they should disclose by enabling them to do so within a framework, which ensures they are protected from reprisals or victimisation.

- 3.3 The monitoring and operation of the policy is one of the functions delegated to the Standards Committee. The policy has been reviewed to ensure that it remains fit for purpose and it is concluded that the existing version is satisfactory and up to date with current legislation and best practice. No amendment is therefore proposed at this stage.
- 3.4 The Committee is asked to note that the policy is published on the Council's website and all new employees are informed about it as part of their induction process. Another Bridgenders message is proposed for this year to keep the profile of the policy high.

4. Current situation / proposal

- 4.1 Since 2018, three concerns under the policy have been lodged with the Monitoring Officer:
- Concerns about asbestos management, lack of documents, health and safety risks due to inadequate surveys and assessments. A full survey was commissioned and remedial work was undertaken;
 - Allegations of purchasing cards being used fraudulently in the Flying Start Team. A full investigation was launched by the Council and the matter reported to the police. The employee resigned and was later prosecuted by the police. The total loss to the Council was £11,573 and the employee agreed to repay the debt in full. The ex-employee was given a 12 month prison sentence, suspended for 12 months, and ordered to complete 125 hours of unpaid work, plus 10 sessions of rehabilitation activity;
 - Concerns about staffing levels and wellbeing in the Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate. Investigations have concluded and while there were some areas of improvement identified there was no evidence to substantiate the complaint. An action plan has been developed to progress the areas for improvement.
- 4.2 The Monitoring Officer will continue to submit reports to the Committee on the operation of the policy.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules

- 5.1 The Policy contributes to the maintenance of probity in the Authority.

6. Equality Act 2010 implications

- 6.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act 2010, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

7. Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 implications

- 7.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. As the report is for information only and is retrospective in nature it is

considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 None.

9. Recommendation

9.1 Members are recommended to note the report.

**Kelly Watson,
Chief Officer – Legal, HR and Regulatory Services
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**Contact Officer: Kelly Watson
Chief Officer – Legal, HR and Regulatory Services**

Telephone: (01656) 643106
E-mail: Kelly.watson@bridgend.gov.uk

Postal Address: Civic Offices,
Angel Street,
Bridgend
CF31 4WB

Background Documents: None