

STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Audit & Accounts Committee

29 November 2024

TITLE:	Whistleblowing Policy
PORTFOLIO HOLDER:	Councillor Chris Wood - Portfolio Holder for Finance
CONTACT OFFICER:	John Leak - Head of Audit
WARDS INVOLVED:	Non-Specific

Appendices Attached – Appendix 1 Whistleblowing Policy

1. Reason for the Report

- 1.1 The *Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998* received the Royal Assent in July 1998 and came into force on 2 July 1999. The Act gives protection to “whistleblowers” that raise concerns about serious fraud or malpractice at their place of work against victimisation or dismissal, provided they have acted in a responsible way in dealing with their concerns. In support of this, the Council actively promotes its Whistleblowing Policy to ensure all relevant parties are aware of it and of how and when to use it.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Whistleblowing Policy attached at Appendix 1 be approved and adopted.
- 2.2 That the committee note the activity outlined in this report, aimed at promoting the Whistleblowing Policy within Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.

3. Executive Summary

- 3.1 Staffordshire Moorlands District Council’s Whistleblowing Policy has been in place since 2002 and has been periodically updated, the last time in December 2023. It allows all employees and contractors to report any concerns where the public interest is at risk, which includes a risk to the wider public, customers, staff or the Council itself. As such, it promotes and supports the requirements of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.

- 3.2 An update report was presented to this committee in December 2023 and since this date there have been no whistleblowing cases reported.
- 3.3 SMDC reviews all of its policies on a regular basis to ensure they are fit for purpose and where appropriate, are continually improving. Previous actions aimed at publicising the Whistleblowing Policy and improving the Council's processes have helped to facilitate a strong culture of disclosure, one that promotes the appropriate use of whistleblowing which has been confirmed by positive responses to previous staff surveys.
- 3.4 The Policy has again been reviewed in accordance with the latest best practice supplied by the whistleblowing charity and leading authority in the field 'Protect', to whom the Council subscribes.
- 3.5 To coincide with this further awareness raising initiatives will be scheduled to ensure Whistleblowing continues to be appropriately publicised.

4. **How this report links to Corporate Priorities**

- 4.1 The Whistleblowing Policy gives protection to employees that raise concerns about serious fraud or malpractice at their place of work against victimisation or dismissal and therefore helps to support our high performing and well motivated workforce.

5. **Alternative Options**

- 5.1 Approve the Whistleblowing Policy (*Recommended*). The Council will have a Whistleblowing Policy based on best practice and current legislation which promotes and supports the requirements of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.
- 5.2 Do not approve the Whistleblowing Policy (*Not Recommended*). The Council will not have an up-to date Whistleblowing Policy based on current best practice and legislation.

6. **Implications**

6.1 Community Safety - (Crime and Disorder Act 1998)

None.

6.2 Workforce

It is essential that all employees are aware of the Whistleblowing Policy and how they can make use of it.

6.3 Equality and Diversity/Equality Impact Assessment

This report has been prepared in accordance with the Council's Diversity and Equality Policies.

6.4 Financial Considerations

None.

6.5 Legal

The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 states that employees and contractors must be allowed to make 'protected disclosures' should they witness any malpractice or similar within the workplace. The Whistleblowing Policy enables them to do this.

6.6 Climate Change

None.

6.7 Consultation

None.

6.8 Risk Assessment

None.

MARTIN OWEN
Executive Director (Resources)

**Web Links and
Background Papers**

Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998

Protect Compliance Toolkit 2023

Contact details

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7. Detail

- 7.1 Staffordshire Moorlands District Council's Whistleblowing Policy (Appendix 1) has been in place since 2002 and has been periodically updated, the last time in December 2023. It allows all employees and contractors to report any concerns where the public interest is at risk, which includes a risk to the wider public, customers, staff or the Council itself. As such, it promotes and supports the requirements of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998.
- 7.2 Staffordshire Moorlands District Council aims to maintain a high performing and well motivated workforce. In support of this, the Council actively promotes its Whistleblowing Policy to ensure all relevant parties are aware of it and how and when to use it.
- 7.3 Previous actions aimed at publicising the Whistleblowing Policy and improving the Council's processes have helped to facilitate a strong culture of disclosure, one that promotes the appropriate use of whistleblowing which has been confirmed by positive responses to previous staff surveys. These actions have included:
- The inclusion of the Whistleblowing Policy in the Induction Process for new members of staff;
 - Articles in previous editions of 'Team Talk' to raise staff awareness;
 - Whistleblowing awareness posters placed on noticeboards throughout the Council.
 - Specific fraud awareness e-learning has been provided to all staff during 2022 to help raise awareness of the importance of discussing with their line managers any concerns they may have regarding malpractice.
- 7.4 An update report was presented to this committee in December 2023 and since this date there have been no whistleblowing cases reported.
- 7.5 SMDC reviews all of its policies on a regular basis to ensure they are fit for purpose and where appropriate, are continually improving, therefore the Policy has again been reviewed in accordance with the latest best practice supplied by the whistleblowing charity and leading authority in the field 'Protect', to whom the Council subscribes. It incorporates the requirements of the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013 with regard to the public interest test and good faith and vicarious liability and is therefore fit for purpose.
- 7.6 To coincide with this further awareness raising initiatives will be scheduled to ensure Whistleblowing continues to be appropriately publicised. These will include:
- An article will be included in 'Team Talk' and thereafter periodically;
 - Whistleblowing promotional material will be reviewed and updated throughout the Council;

- Practical tips will be given to all Managers and Supervisors to help them deal with any whistleblowing issues raised by their staff;