



Chelmsford City Council Governance Committee

4th March 2026

Annual Whistleblowing Report

Report by:

Director of Connected Chelmsford

Officer Contact:

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Purpose

To provide an annual update to members of the Governance Committee on the operation of the Council's Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure.

Recommendations

1. To note the contents of the report as regards whistleblowing allegations received for 2025 calendar year.
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1. Background

- 1.1. The Council's Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure was first introduced in October 1997. Since that time the policy has been updated and reviewed periodically to ensure it is compliant with any changes in legislation or guidance, most notably a light touch review was undertaken during 2023/4.
- 1.2. The policy establishes a system whereby employees of the Council, including agency workers, consultants, users of its services, members of the public and Councillors, are able to report suspected wrongdoing. By doing so the Council

publicly declares that it does not tolerate malpractice or fraudulent activities in the operation of its services.

- 1.3. The Council's Whistleblowing Policy highlights the legal protection for workers who "blow the whistle" (i.e. the 'Whistleblower') and ensure that they do not suffer any recriminations, victimisation or harassment as a result of raising a concern with the Council. An employee who makes a protected disclosure benefits from legal protection if they have a reasonable belief that the issue being raised is in the public interest.
- 1.4. Employees are protected under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 as amended, which means that the Council cannot discriminate against them because they made such a complaint. That protection is not subject to any qualifying period of employment and is referred to as a 'day one' right in employment law. The principles of protection are also applied to non-employees under the Council's Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure.
- 1.5. The Council's appointed Whistleblowing Officer is the Director of Connected Chelmsford. However, the day-to-day management and handling of issues raised is dealt with by the Legal & Democratic Services Manager or, in their absence, the Human Resources Services Manager. Both have delegated authority to receive and investigate complaints under the procedure whilst safeguarding the confidentiality of the complainant as far as is possible. Normally this means the identity of the whistleblower will only be known by the officer managing the complaint and any investigator. All complaints raised are fully considered and dealt with as quickly as possible.
- 1.6. In some cases the issue raised is not strictly a whistleblowing matter but arises from a complaint about a service received from the Council. In those cases the complainant is directed to the complaints process and the matter dealt with through that procedure instead if the person wishes to proceed.
- 1.7. As is best practice an annual report is made to the Governance Committee regarding the issues addressed. This report sets out the position in relation to reports made during 2025. The Council's existing Retention and Destruction Policy in relation to Whistleblowing complaints is to retain records for 6 years after matters are completed and accordingly the report has been updated to include data from the last 6 years.

2. Position Update and Analysis

2.1. The table below provides a history of the number of whistleblowing reported cases received over the previous years:

Year	Number of complaints received
2020 (January - October 2020)	5
2021 (November 2020 to November 2021)	12
2022 (December 2021 to September 2022)	5
2023 (October 2022 to Sept 23/October to December 2023)	9/1
2024 (January to December)	9
2025 (January to December)	17

2.2. A summary of the 17 complaints received over the past year is set out below. Members are reminded that limited information cannot be provided due to the confidentiality protection to which whistle blowers are entitled. 4 reports were made that were directed to the wrong body or where the person named did not work for the Council so no further action was taken. 5 reports were service provision related (2 were considered more appropriate to be dealt with under the complaints process and 3 were investigated and appropriate responses provided). 8 reports alleged misconduct of staff (eg fraud, intoxication, bullying, harassment). Of the 8 matters 2 (received December 2025) investigations have not yet concluded. There have also been a further 8 whistleblowing allegations received during 2026, most of which have recently been concluded.

How they were processed

No public interest dimension so could not be dealt with as a WB complaint, or was instead assessed and investigated as a service complaint or grievance	2
Assessed and investigated as a whistleblowing complaint.	11
Not capable of resolution by the City Council (i.e. outside our jurisdiction)	4

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- 2.3. It is apparent that both staff and members of the public have confidence in the Council and are willing to raise concerns. The electronic facilities for logging complaints through the dedicated whistleblowing mailbox via a website form remain the preferred method of communication with only two reports being made by email instead. The publicity arrangements for whistleblowing also appear to be embedded and well known, which is demonstrated by the increased number of reports being made.
- 2.4. Every effort is made to maintain confidentiality where requested. When this is not possible complainants are advised and provided with the reasons. Complainants' details are not disclosed until they are made aware of how they will be used. This allows officers to follow up on concerns raised and to provide progress updates and feedback when a case is concluded. This approach instils trust and confidence in the arrangements in place and fosters a relationship of openness and accountability. However, it should be noted that almost half of the reports made during 2025 were anonymous. This does sometimes make it more difficult to investigate concerns due to lack of information and there is no opportunity to obtain further information.
- 2.5. The policy is part of staff induction training and is easily accessible on the Council's website. It should be noted that Audit and Risk Committee have reviewed the Fraud and Corruption Policy and Anti Bribery Policy. The Whistleblowing Policy has been reviewed to ensure they are aligned and compliment the overall arrangements. Training in relation to whistleblowing and fraud/corruption training modules was provided to senior managers and all staff at the end of 2024.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1. Members of the Governance Committee are asked to note the details as to the actions taken and complaints received for the latest annual review.

List of appendices: None

Background papers: None

Corporate Implications

Legal/Constitutional: The legislative requirements are addressed in the report which falls within the remit of Governance Committee.

Financial: None, although the process enables reporting of potential fraudulent activities and malpractices that may affect the financial position of the Council

Potential impact on climate change and the environment: None

Contribution toward achieving a net zero carbon position by 2030: None

Personnel: The process underpins the promotion of a culture of openness and transparency and creates an environment where whistleblowing is encouraged and supported.

Risk Management: The process assists to minimise the risk of malpractice and fraud within the Council

Equality and Diversity: The policy and procedure has not changed so no impact assessment is required

Health and Safety: Establishment of whistleblowing procedures ensures that both Council employees and users of its services are able to confidentially report matters of concern (including those with H&S implications) and for these to be proactively addressed.

Digital: None

Other: None

Consultees:

None

Relevant Policies and Strategies:

The report takes into account the following policies and strategies of the Council:

- Whistleblowing Policy and Procedure
 - Fraud and Corruption Strategy
 - Anti-bribery Policy
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