

Equality impact assessments – for services and policies

What is an equality impact assessment?

An equality impact assessment is an important part of our commitment to improving equality practice. The form will help us find out what impact or consequences our functions, policies, procedures and practices have on our citizens, employees and potential employees.

By undertaking an impact assessment, we are able to:

- Take into account the needs, experiences and circumstances of those groups of people who use (or don't / can't use) our services.
- Identify any inequalities people may experience.
- Think about the other ways in which we can deliver our services which will not lead to inequalities.
- Develop better policy-making, procedures and services.

Impact assessment are required by law; The Race Relations Amendment Act, The Disability Discrimination Act and the amended Sex Discrimination Act all require local authorities to assess the impact of their functions, policies, practices and services, or the likely impact of any that are proposed, on equality.

However, our view is that we should be using the results of impact assessment to improve service delivery so that we become more accountable to the people that we serve.

Background

Name of service / policy and date	Whistleblowing Policy
Lead officer	Janet Martin, HR Manager
Other people involved in completing this form	Donna Marks, One Legal

Step 1 - About the project

<p>What is the aim of the project and what outcomes is it contributing to</p>	<p>The proposed changes to the Whistleblowing Policy have been developed in response to the need to review the current policy and update it to reflect legislative and employer responsibilities. The aim of the policy is ensure that the Council protects staff who report or whistle-blow about any areas of concern within the authority and to safeguard those against whom allegations have been made. The policy also aims to assist the Counter Fraud Unit, by having a policy which can be used not only with this authority, but with the four authorities in the GOSS partnership (Cheltenham Borough Council, Cotswold District Council, West Oxfordshire District Council and the Forest of Dean District Council. The policy has been developed in consultation with the Counter Fraud Unit.</p> <p>The main purpose of the Whistleblowing process is to enable employees, former employees and relevant stakeholders to bring any improper conduct of unlawful action to the attention of the Council or relevant external bodies, while protecting their anonymity, and supporting them through the process. The process is designed to prevent the individual from being the subject of victimisation, harassment or discrimination as a result of their allegations.</p> <p>The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 provides for an anti fraud mechanism in all public service environments. This is a way for staff, members and partners to raise concerns about fraud and corruption in confidence.</p> <p>The Whistleblowing process is designed to support individuals who have genuine concerns in the interests of assisting the council in eliminating fraud. Malicious or false concerns will not be tolerated and raising them may result in disciplinary action.</p>
<p>Who are the primary customers of the project and how do they / will they benefit</p>	<p>The primary customers are staff at Tewkesbury Borough Council, ex employees and the Counter Fraud Unit. This policy is applicable to all current and former employees, members, and external stakeholders. It is essential that the Council supports and encourages whistle-blowers, to maintain transparent and efficient working practices, and protects them from potential discrimination or victimisation as a result of their complaints.</p>

<p>How and where is the policy implemented</p>	<p>In order to implement the new policy there will be staff briefings to let staff know about it and how it works. The policy will be available on the intranet and the internet. The Council communicates its commitment to protecting and supporting whistle-blowers via the intranet and additional statements in the complaints procedure and the counter fraud and corruption strategy. The Council believes that a culture of openness and honesty is key to tackling fraud and this process is vital in allowing employees and partners to highlight areas which require investigation.</p> <p>A whistleblower is defined by the Council as an employee, former employee or member of a relevant business who reports misconduct to the Council or to an external organisation which has the power to intervene. The Council supports anyone who has witnessed fraud or has genuine concerns about possible improper conduct by officers or members. The Council aims to promote the confidentiality of the Whistleblowing process, however where the information provided or statement by the whistleblower contributes to a criminal prosecution, this information may be disclosed in court.</p> <p>The whistleblowing process is closely linked to guidance and policy which determines the Council's expectations of staff and inappropriate behaviours. As a result, this procedure may be used in conjunction with policies such as the grievance and disciplinary procedure. An employee may also be advised by the HR team as to what process is most appropriate in their case, e.g. they may be inclined to use the whistleblowing process but a grievance may be a more appropriate course of action and they may be advised to use this process instead to resolve the issue.</p> <p>As a whistleblower is essentially raising a concern about improper action or unlawful conduct in relation to the Council in a protected environment, the whistleblowing process is very closely linked to the supporting framework of policies and procedures which govern the actions of employees within the Council.</p>
<p>What potential barriers might already exist to achieving these outcomes</p>	<p>Fear of potential discrimination or victimisation and defamation of character as a result of raising a complaint.</p>

Step 2 – What do you know already about your existing / potential customers

What existing information and data do you have about your existing / potential customers e.g. Statistics, customer feedback, performance information	There is no data available.
What does it tell you about who use your service / policy and those that don't?	
What have you learnt about real barriers to your service from any consultation with customers and any stakeholder groups?	Fear of potential victimisation and harassment and not being believed.
If not, who do you have plans to consult with about the service / policy?	The current Whistleblowing procedure is the result of consultation with trade union representatives, CMT, Audit Committee, and Heads of HR across the other four GOSS authorities.

Step 3 - Assessing Impact

How does your service / policy impact on different groups in the community? The groups in bullets are current priority groups identified by the CSP.

Group	What are you already doing to benefit this group	What are you doing that might disadvantage this group	What could you do differently to benefit this group	No impact on this group
Ethnicity / Race <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bangladeshi women • Economic migrants • Chinese community BME young people				There is no impact on this group. No monitoring data is available by Race group on the take-up of the Whistleblowing process. The procedure applies equally to all races and access to information about the

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				procedure is available to all council employees irrespective of race.
Gender and trans-gender <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women who are not in work • Trans-gender people 				There is no impact on this group. Although no monitoring data is available on the take-up of this procedure, the procedure applies equally to all genders and access to information about the procedure is available to all council employees irrespective of gender.
Age <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older people experiencing isolation and poverty • Vulnerable children and young people 				There is no impact on this group. No monitoring data is available on the take-up of this process by age. Access to the information on and communication about the Whistleblowing procedure is equal, irrespective of age. As a result this procedure has a neutral impact on employees depending on age group.

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				<p>Age-related impairments such as degeneration in sight and hearing will affect older employees disproportionately.</p> <p>However, the accessible formats available to all employees will mediate any potential negative impact this may have on older workers.</p>
<p>Disability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People experiencing mental ill-health • People with physical disabilities • Children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities 				<p>There is no impact on this group. No monitoring data is available on the take-up of this process by disabled and non-disabled stakeholders.</p> <p>Access to information regarding the procedure is available via the council's intranet and council-wide communications.</p> <p>All council communications are available in accessible formats on request as are Council Policies e.g. in Braille and larger print.</p>

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				External access to the intranet is assisted through the options to increase text size and to browse Webpages 'Aloud', enabling visually impaired individuals to access information.
<p>Religion or belief</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muslim community 		Religion or belief is not being monitored by the Council.		<p>No monitoring data is available on the take-up of this process by stakeholders by religion/faith.</p> <p>Access to the available information on the Whistleblowing process is equal irrespective of their religious belief and as a result the impact of this procedure does not differ depending on group.</p>
<p>Sexual orientation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesbian women • Gay men • Bi-sexual people 		Sexual orientation is not being monitored by the council.		<p>No monitoring data is available on the take-up of this process by employees by orientation. The information available on the Whistleblowing process is equally accessible irrespective of orientation and as a result the impact of this procedure does not differ depending on group.</p>

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<p>Other socially excluded groups or communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People on low incomes • People with poor literacy skills • Gypsies and Travellers 				<p>As the procedure is written in English there is a potential impact on employees whose first language is not English and therefore may struggle reading the policy. It is a universal re-quisite that all Council employees are fluent in English so as to enable them to deliver services and engage with the organisation. In addition, it is expected that HR makes employees aware of council policies in their HR induction and answer any questions they may have.</p>
<p>Staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who work part-time or on an irregular shift pattern • Staff with caring responsibilities • Staff who are on maternity or paternity leave 				<p>There is no impact on this group. Access to the available information on the Whistleblowing process is equal irrespective of staff in this group; and as a result the impact of this procedure does not differ depending on working full-time, part-time, and caring responsibilities of those on maternity or paternity leave. Staff on maternity</p>

				leave can be kept up to date through keeping in touch days.
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Step 4 - what are the differences

<p>Are any groups affected in different ways to others as a result of the whistleblowing policy</p>	<p>This procedure applies equally to all Council employees, members, past employees and external stakeholders and provides a confidential service which does not discriminate in any of the equalities strands.</p> <p>Race: There is no negative impact identified in this EQIA by race.</p> <p>Gender: There is no negative impact identified in this EQIA by gender.</p> <p>Disability: There is no negative impact identified in this EQIA on disabled or non-disabled stakeholders</p> <p>Age: There is no negative impact identified in this EQIA by age</p> <p>Sexual Orientation: There is no negative impact identified in this EQIA by sexual orientation.</p> <p>Religious/Faith groups: There is no negative impact identified in this EQIA by religion/ faith.</p>
<p>Does the proposed whistleblowing policy either directly or indirectly discriminate?</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>If yes, what can be done to improve this?</p>	<p>Not applicable.</p>
<p>Are there any other ways in which the service can help support priority communities in Tewkesbury?</p>	<p>None identified.</p>

Step 5 – taking things forward

<p>What are the key actions to be carried out and how will they be resourced and monitored?</p>	<p>Action Plan Below</p>				
	<p>Recommendation</p>	<p>Key activity</p>	<p>Progress milestones</p>	<p>Officer Responsible</p>	<p>Progress</p>
	<p>Publicise Whistleblowing Policy on the Intranet and internet.</p> <p>This would reinforce the message of support from senior managers and promote the process to all employees.</p>	<p>Publicise the Policy on the Intranet and internet.</p>	<p>Publication of the Policy on the Intranet and internet</p>	<p>HR/Webmaster</p>	<p>Identified location on new website</p>
<p>Communication</p>	<p>Ensure that employees and managers are aware of the Whistleblowing procedure and how it applies to their role.</p>	<p>Raised awareness and understanding of the procedure. Staff briefings</p>	<p>Communications officer, HR and One Legal</p>	<p>Plan to do staff briefings</p>	
<p>Who will play a role in the decision-making process?</p>	<p>Corporate Leadership Team, Managers and Human Resources.</p>				
<p>What are your learning and development needs?</p>	<p>These are contained in the action plan</p>				
<p>How will you capture these actions in your service planning?</p>	<p>This will be captured in the high level service plans.</p>				